



ORTHODOX MYSTICISM AND ASCETICISM

*Philosophy and Theology in
St Gregory Palamas' Work*

Edited by **Constantinos Athanasopoulos**

Orthodox Mysticism and Asceticism

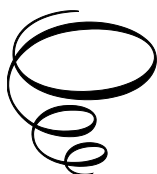
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LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN OF VEROIA, NAOUSA AND CAMPANIA, MR. PANTELEIMON



† Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ
ΒΕΡΟΙΑΣ, ΝΑΟΥΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΜΠΑΝΙΑΣ
ΠΑΝΤΕΛΕΗΜΩΝ

Βέροια, 1 Νοεμβρίου 2019

Πρὸς
Τὸν Ἐλλογιμώτατον Καθηγητὴν
Κωνσταντῖνον Ἀθανασόπουλον, Δρα Φ.,
Εἰς Ἀγίαν Παρασκευὴν

Ἐλλογιμώτατε καὶ ἀγαπητέ μου κ. Ἀθανασόπουλε,

Ἡ ἐξέχουσα καὶ φωτόμορφος καὶ θεοείκελος μορφή τοῦ μεγάλου θεόπτη τῆς Ἀγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας, τοῦ κήρυκος τῆς θεώσεως, τοῦ Ἱεράρχου καὶ ἀσκητοῦ τῆς θεοπτίας, τοῦ μεγάλου θεολόγου καὶ φωστήρος τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου δόγματος, τοῦ προστάτου τῶν μοναστῶν καὶ τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου ἡσυχασμοῦ, ἀποτελεῖ γιὰ τὴν Ἀποστολικὴ Βέροια ἓνα μεγάλο καύχημα.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, ὁ παμφαῆς λαμπτὴρ τοῦ ἀκτίστου φωτός, κατὰ τὰ πέντε χρόνια τῆς ἐδῶ παραμονῆς του στὴ Σκήτη λίγο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη, καθαγίασε μὲ τὶς ἀδιάλειπτες προσευχητικὲς του ἀναπνοὲς τὸν ἀέρα τῆς περιοχῆς, πότισε μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας τὰ χώματα αὐτοῦ τοῦ εὐλογημένου μακεδονικοῦ τόπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ φώτισε μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ ἀκτινοβολία του ὁλόκληρο τὸν κόσμο. Ὁ ἅγιος εἶναι ἓνα σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον, ποῦ κεῖται εἰς πτώσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν, πτώσιν τῶν λατινοφρόνων, τῶν ἀθεολογῶν, τῶν ἄγνευτων τῆς μυστικῆς ἡσυχαστικῆς ἐν Θεῷ ἐμπειρίας, τῶν πολεμίων τῆς ψυχασωματικῆς τελειώσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνάστασιν ὅλων ἐκείνων τῶν ἀπλῶν, ποῦ ζοῦν βιωματικὰ τὸν Θεό, ποῦ ἀγιάζονται ψυχή τε καὶ σῶματι, ποῦ βλέπουν σὸ ἀκτίστο φῶς τῆς Μεταμορφώσεως τοῦ Κυρίου τὴν δυνατότητα καὶ τῆς δικῆς τους προσωπικῆς ἐν τῷ ἀκτίστῳ φωτὶ μεταμορφώσεως, τῆς καλῆς ἀλλοιώσεως, τῆς ἐν Ἀγίῳ Πνεύματι τελειώσεως.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, συνεχιστὴς τῆς ὑπερχιλιετοῦς ἐμπειρίας τῶν προφητῶν τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τοῦ μεγίστου Ἀποστόλου τῶν Ἑθνῶν Παύλου, τοῦ καὶ ἱδρυτοῦ τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τοῦ Πρωτοδιακόνου Στεφάνου, τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως, τῶν

Letter from His Eminence Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa
and Campagnia, Mr. Panteleimon

μεγίστων Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ θεολόγων, θεοπτῶν καὶ φωστήρων, καὶ τῶν ὁσίων μοναστῶν, μὲ τὰ πνευματέμφορα συγγράμματά του, τοὺς ἀγῶνες του γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς θεώσεως τοῦ ὅλου ἀνθρώπου, τὰ μοναστικά του παλαιόματα, τὴν ἐρευνα μέσα στὸ ἐσώτερο σκοτὸς τῆς ψυχῆς του τοῦ αἰδίου φωτὸς τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἔρχεται καὶ σήμερα δι' ἄλλον τρόπον, μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκδόσεις τῶν ἔργων του, τὰ συνέδρια καὶ τὶς ἡμερίδες, τὶς μελέτες γιὰ τὴν ἀγιοπνευματικὴ ἐμπειρία καὶ θεολογία του, νὰ μᾶς διδάξῃ μακραιώνες ἀλήθειες, νὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ μὲ τὸν λόγον του μέσα σὲ μία ἐποχὴ ποὺ κυριαρχεῖ τὸ πνευματικὸ σκοτάδι, νὰ μᾶς ξυπνήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ὀATHυμία καὶ τὸν ὕπνον τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν παθῶν, νὰ ἀνακατευθύνῃ τὴ ζωὴ ἐκείνων ποὺ θέλουν τὸ φῶς, ἀγαποῦν τὸ φῶς, πορεύονται πρὸς τὸ φῶς, καὶ ζητοῦν νὰ εἶναι αἰωνίως μέσα σὲ αὐτό.

Γιὰ τοῦτο τὸν λόγον ἀποτελεῖ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ταπεινότητά μου, τὸν Ἐπίσκοπο καὶ Μητροπολίτη αὐτῆς τῆς εὐλογημένης περιοχῆς, μεγίστη χαρὰ κάθε πνευματικὴ ἐκδήλωση καὶ διοργάνωση ποὺ προβάλλει τὸν ἀστὲρα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξιας καὶ διδάσκαλο τῆς θεώσεως.

Ἰδιαιτέρως χαίρομαι καὶ καυχῶμαι γιὰ τὴν διεξαγωγὴ στοὺς χώρους τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Παναγίας Καλλιπέτρας τοῦ Σεμιναρίου γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο κατὰ τὸ παρελθόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ μέλλον.

Εὐχομαι καὶ ἐλπίζω καὶ προσεύχομαι στὸν Κύριο νὰ εὐλογῇ πάντοτε διὰ πρεσβειῶν τοῦ ἁγίου τοῦ ἐν λόγῳ Σεμιναρίου καὶ νὰ χαρίσῃ στοὺς διοργανωτὲς του καὶ κυρίως σὲ σᾶς, τὸν πρωτεργάτη, ὑγεία καὶ ὅλα τὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ ὕλικά ἀγαθὰ, ἀξιῶνοντας ὅλους μας νὰ διαλύσουμε τὰ σκοτάδια τῶν παθῶν ἐντὸς ἡμῶν καὶ νὰ λάμψουμε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν οὐρανῷ μπροστὰ στὸν ἀγαπημένο μας Ἀναστάντα Κύριο.

Ὅθεν διατελῶ,

Μετὰ σεοχαρῆς ἐν Κυρίῳ, ἡγάριος καὶ εὐφρῆς
Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ
 τῆς Βεροίας καὶ Ναούσης καὶ Καμπανίας
 Ὁ Βεροίας, Ναούσης καὶ Καμπανίας Παντελεήμων

The Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia Mr. Panteleimon

Veroia 1/11/2019

To: Dr. Constantinos Athanasopoulos

Dear Dr. Athanasopoulos

The eminent, holy, great, and godlike Orthodox preacher of deification, the Hierarch and ascetic of *theoptia*, the great theologian and teacher of Orthodox dogma, the protector and guardian of monks and Orthodox hesychasm, is for the Apostolic city of Veroia a great source of pride. St Gregory Palamas, the illuminator in our hearts and minds of all truths related to the uncreated light, during his stay at the Skete of Veroia (a short distance from the city) made holy with his ceaseless prayerful breath the air of the area, made moist with his tears the soil of this holy and blessed Macedonian locality but also enlightened with his spiritual radiance all the world. The saint is still a point of debate, a reason for the fall and rise of many: the fall of all who still believe in the errors of the Latins, the errors of all who lack proper theological training and interest, the errors of all who lack an inner mystical hesychastic experience of God, of all who oppose the effort for attaining a psycho-somatic perfection for man; but, at the same time, the saint is a reason for the rise of all those who live a simple life, experientially living God's presence in their lives, who are continuously sanctified in their body and their minds and souls, who see, in the Transfiguration of Christ, the possibility of their personal transformation in uncreated light, the good alienation from their fallen nature, their perfection in the Holy Spirit.

St Gregory Palamas continues the more than thousand-year-old lived experience of God that is evidenced in the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles of the New Testament, the Great Apostle of the Nations, St Paul, who is the founder of our local Church, the first called Deacon Stephen, the martyrs of our faith, the great Hierarchs and theologians, in short, he continues the tradition of all the radiant holy men and women who have seen and directly experienced God throughout the centuries. He continues in this same tradition of lived experience and testimony of God with his many divinely inspired writings, his pain-filled efforts in supporting the truth of the deification of the whole man, his many monastic and ascetic victories, his research into the depths of his soul and the elevated lofts of the eternal light of the Kingdom of God. Today, with the saint's many editions of his works, the conferences and

workshops organised in his honour, the many studies of his experience of the Holy Spirit and divinely inspired theology, the saint again comes to teach us eternal truths, enlighten our spiritually dark world, and wake us from the slumber of our sinful passions; he redirects the life of all who wish to see the light, love the light, walk towards the light and live eternally within the light.

For these reasons, it is for me, a humble Bishop and Metropolitan of this blessed part of Macedonia, a great joy to see the organisation of any spiritual and intellectual event that examines the work and life of this star of Orthodoxy, and teacher of *theosis*.

I am particularly delighted and take pride in the organisation of your conference in the Holy Monastery of the Most Holy Virgin Mother of God of Kallipetra, both in the past and in the future.

I continuously pray to our Lord to bless always, with the intercessions of our Holy Saint, the Palamas Seminar participants that you and your collaborators organise and bring together, so that we all are deemed worthy to disperse the darkness of our passions in our hearts, and shine as radiant lights in the heavens when our time comes to present ourselves in the face of our Resurrected Lord.

With love in Christ and honour
Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia.
Panteleimon.

INTRODUCTION

DR. CONSTANTINOS ATHANASOPOULOS

The collection of papers presented here are contributions to scholarship regarding the work of an important late-Byzantine philosopher and theologian: St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). His work is significant because he defended the hesychastic practices and theology of the monks of the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos) in Macedonia, on the northern Greek peninsula of Chalkidiki, where he lived for most of his life (he also lived for a few years at the Skete Veroias, another famous Central Macedonian monastic centre of the time). In his writings, St Gregory Palamas put forward a systematic and elaborate (philosophical and theological) defence of how one who is alive can know and unite with the infinite, ontologically and radically distinct from creation, simple and unknowable, triune God.

A unifying theme of the papers included here is the way Palamas brings together *praxis* and *theoria*, or, in other words, asceticism and mysticism, and the wider influence that this had on modern and contemporary Orthodox and non-Orthodox philosophy and theology. St Gregory Palamas would not be influential nor important for us today, if he had been born somewhere else, at some other time, or if indeed his main adversary in the debates, Monk Varlaam (or Barlaam) of Calabria (1290-1348, who, later in life, became the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gerace) did not attack, with particular rigour, the long-established (by that time) hesychastic practices of the monks of Holy Mountain.

The interaction between Palamas and Varlaam is not simply a story of two people who, while fighting for the same cause (i.e., defending the Orthodox dogma on the Holy Trinity against the Roman Catholic additions to the Nicene Creed), found themselves arch enemies. It is a story of an opposition between two different cultural, philosophical and theological views on salvation, the Holy Trinity, and relations between Church and political power. This opposition started before the two great schisms of the Church in the ninth and later in the eleventh century and developed into two radically different worldviews of Christianity that we now divide into East and West (i.e., Eastern Orthodox Christianity and

Western Roman Catholic Christianity; or Eastern Church and Western Church—more simply put, East and West; note that now “West” includes the various Protestant Churches). What scholars usually examine in the work of St Gregory Palamas is the later stage in the development of this opposition, an opposition that still holds and is widely accepted in the East. This opposition is still polemical in both the West and the East (even though one can see attempts at reconciliation on both sides and the establishment of an ongoing ecclesiastical dialogue). In the West, there are still publications arguing for the heretical nature of some of the texts of Palamas, and in the East Palamas’ texts are still used by Orthodox monastic communities and local synods of Orthodox bishops in theological and philosophical refutations of key theses of the non-Orthodox Christian Churches (and lately in criticising the Ecumenical Patriarch for his attempts to pray together with leaders of other Churches, such as the Pope and/or the heads of Protestant Churches). Regardless of the ongoing controversies, the reader should expect to see in this collection a sober and academically disciplined study of Palamas’ texts and their influence. In some of their aspects, the papers here continue the work of researchers published in previously edited works on the study of Palamas (Athanasopoulos & Schneider, ed. 2013; Athanasopoulos, ed. 2015a). The reader should combine the reading of this introduction here with the introduction found in Athanasopoulos (2015a), where some of the background to the debates is discussed in more detail.

The majority of the papers contained in this book are contributions to the Palamas Seminar International Conference which took place in Veroia (a Macedonian city in Northern Greece) in June 2015, with the blessing of the Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campagna, Mr. Panteleimon. Its topic, “Hesychasm in the work of Palamas” gave an opportunity to the more than 17 participants from Europe, Asia, and the Americas to discuss various aspects of the hesychastic work of St Gregory Palamas, ranging from aesthetics to political philosophy, and from ethics and cultural theory to metaphysics. Most of the speakers, however, discussed both aspects of the philosophical and theological work of St Gregory Palamas that appear in the title of this book, i.e., Palamas’ mysticism and asceticism. For the tremendous success of the 2015 conference at Veroia we are indebted to His Eminence, Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campania, Mr. Panteleimon for his blessing and for allowing us to have the conference in one of the historic Holy Monasteries of the Holy Skete of Veroia (a place where St Gregory Palamas and most of his family lived as monks and nuns). We are also greatly indebted to the

Right Reverend, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Theotokos at Kallipetra, Archimandrite Palamas, for the wonderful hospitality we received from his great team of monks and the resourceful and skilful team of women helpers that prepared the food and made the other arrangements for our meetings there. Special thanks are also owed to the Association of Pontian Greeks “Panagia Soumela” for the accommodation offered to participants at the Pilgrim Centre of Soumela in Vermion. Lastly, we wish to offer our warmest thanks to the monastic community of the Holy Mountain, and especially the Fathers of the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi for welcoming the men of the conference for a short visit, after the proceedings at Veroia, and talking to us on various aspects of Athonite hesychasm and asceticism.

The selection method for the papers of this volume consisted in a two-phase process: a) finalised versions of the papers were read and commented upon and feedback was provided to their authors at an early stage in terms of whether the papers were publishable as they were or needed serious revision; b) the authors of revised papers were then asked to observe the format guidelines and other stylistic editorial requirements. Only the papers that passed through these two stages are contained in this work. In addition to these papers, I have added two papers that were read at different Conferences: a paper on Romanian hesychasm that was read at the Thessaloniki 2012 International Conference on the cultural and theological significance of followers of St Gregory Palamas. The paper was re-submitted for this book (again observing the two-phase process and because its topic was suited to the title and discussed an important aspect of Palamas’ ascetic and hesychastic influence in the 17th and later centuries, through the collection of texts named Philokalia- this collection of texts will be further discussed in Conferences that Palamas Seminar is organising in 2019, 2020 and 2021). I have also added my paper on St Gregory Palamas and Meister Eckhart, a version of which I read at the Conference on St Gregory Palamas and Meister Eckhart, organised by my esteemed colleague and collaborator in the Palamas Seminar, Professor Oleg Dushin, in St Petersburg during 2014 (published later, in Russian translation, in *Verbum*). I have significantly revised the paper and included it here because it was never published in English and it discusses aspects of St Gregory Palamas’ mysticism and asceticism that readers might find interesting. In the Appendix, I have included the very interesting letter prepared by Abbot Palamas; this letter was submitted with other documents by the Holy Metropolis of Veroia, Naousa and Campana in its application to the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the recognition of the family of Palamas as saints of the Orthodox Church (now celebrated on the Feast

Day for the Family of Palamas on December 18). Before I proceed to the discussion of some key ideas in terms of each contribution included in this collection of papers, I will discuss some issues found in a book review that was published in the *Philosophical Quarterly* regarding a previous collection of papers I edited. These papers were read at the International Conference on St Gregory Palamas that I organised in Thessaloniki in 2012 and were published in 2015 (see Athanasopoulos, ed., 2015a). I will also include in this part of my introduction (i.e., before the discussion of the papers presented in this work) some brief details about the Palamas Seminar. My general aim in these parts of the introduction is to allow the reader to understand the background of the scholarship and the meetings that Palamas Seminar organises.

I hold, as a matter of policy (one that I always try to follow as an editor), not to censure and limit the freedom of speech and opinion of the authors presented in the works I edit. What I insist upon is that they follow the same key standards of style and scholarship. This includes the rule that the authors justify their views through appropriate bibliographical evidence and logical arguments, which explain and justify their evidence; I do this so that their overall views and perspectives on the wider topic make sense to the general public and are accurate and representative of the debates in a rounded and balanced way. As you may understand, this means that in trying to observe this editorial policy of pro-academic freedom sometimes I include works that express views that run contrary to what I consider to be the most plausible readings of the texts of Palamas. In these cases, I consider as part of my freedom of expression and my duty to the readership of the book to express publicly my disagreements in the introduction, with the hope that, in this way, the reader gains a wider and more rounded perspective on the debates (note that I also maintain a policy of communicating my disagreement with the writer early in the feedback I provide especially during the first phase of my editorial duties, so that, if they wish, they can address it with their particular arguments in the revised versions of their work).

Surprisingly, in a book review (Pattison 2017) of a previous collection of papers I edited (Athanasopoulos, ed., 2015a), the reviewer noted my open expression of disagreement regarding the interpretations of some of the contributors in the introduction of that book. He also made a few other points that I think would be best addressed here. So, in this part of my introduction, I wish to answer some remarks that appeared in this review (Pattison 2017), so that I can clarify my approach to the editing of the papers and to offer my views on what I regard as plausible readings of

Palamas' work. I hope that, in the future, I will be able to write more extensively on these issues, but, as all things go in life, no one knows when (and if) a more opportune time will come. As such, allow me to start first with a major point of contention.

Why East vs. West in Palamas' studies?

I would like to examine this question with another question: is a differentiation between West and East a valid position in the study of the work of St Gregory Palamas? The content of what we examine and how we use it to support such a differentiation is of great importance here. As in all research outputs, the focus of the question under investigation and the methodology with which we approach possible answers to this question are extremely significant.

If Palamas were alive today, he would certainly think that there is a great differentiation between these two worldviews (East vs. West), and for most Palamas' scholars in Greece and the Orthodox world more widely (the East), this is a valid stance (even though at least some of Palamas' supporters would not accept that there is a split in Christianity: they would claim that all non-Orthodox are heretical and non-Christian and that there is only one true Christian Church, the Orthodox). Note immediately the first difference between East and West: in the non-Orthodox world (the West), there is no such broad agreement on the existence of this radical division between these two perspectives. For example, a writer with many contributions to Palamas' scholarship, Antoine Levy (a Roman Catholic scholar) challenges this differentiation, especially when it comes to the "theological apparatus" involved. He writes: "There is an East and a West within Christianity. As is well-known, the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches do not share the same understanding regarding the distribution of power in the Church. While this fact can certainly account for the division between two entities, it sheds little light on the contrast between their theological apparatus" (Levy 2013, p.96). This is not an isolated example; there are many Roman Catholic or Protestant scholars, who have views that are similar to this one (with most emphasising the convergence around key Christian beliefs, claiming that this new trend in Christian theology and philosophy, i.e., finding a convergence between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant theological and philosophical views, should constitute the basis and support for what they term "New Orthodoxy" or "Radical Orthodoxy").

We also have a small number of scholars who claim to be Orthodox who also criticise this differentiation. Some of them base their

contention on theological grounds, some others on cultural critique (post-modern and post-structuralist). The ones who are making a theological point, see the theology of Palamas as being very close to many similar tendencies among mediaeval scholars (for example, Bonaventura, Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, etc.). The ones with a specific cultural critique standpoint focus on the efforts of contemporary Orthodox and Roman Catholic scholars (and similar-minded ecclesiastical leaders) to overcome theological and philosophical barriers in the search for an ecumenical approach to such theological debates and the eventual union of all the Christian Churches. Note, however, even in the ecumenical movement, there is a discussion that recognises that the differences between East and West *are* significant, and so this differentiation actually should remain at least for clarificatory purposes; furthermore, some ecumenically-minded Orthodox theologians consider that there should be an added differentiation between “Chalcedonian Orthodox” and “Oriental Orthodox” (see for the importance of this Lossky 1991). In passing, let me note that Palamas’ supporters would not accept as “Orthodox” the non-Chalcedonian “Oriental” Churches, because, by the time of the debates with Varlaam, it was clear that what is now known as “Oriental Orthodox” presented a challenge to Orthodox Christological dogma. So, for our purposes in Palamas’ scholarship, it is safe to say that what in current theological debates is termed East vs. West is the debate between Christian (Chalcedonian) Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism (and/or Protestantism), and that this Orthodoxy has nothing to do with “New Orthodoxy” and “Radical Orthodoxy” (as these terms are used primarily by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers).

Putting aside some of the significant similarities between the two approaches, I have argued repeatedly in the past that we should not only accept that there *is* a difference in the perspectives of East and West but also that we have to respect these radically distinct and culturally broad differences as binding and valid, especially when we approach the work of Palamas (please note that I am not claiming that this should be an obstacle to communication and fruitful exchange between scholars of the East and West; only that there should be an understanding of the differences and similarities in these domains, especially when we approach the work of Palamas). There is a significant theological basis for such a position. This comes not just from the actual works of Palamas, the *Tomos* of the Holy Mountain Fathers (which was the first step in making the Palamite theology of hesychasm canonical in Orthodox theology) and other early Orthodox works commenting on the debates but also in the work of contemporary theologians, such as Saint Justin Popovic (1894-1979) and

Saint Nikolai Velimirovic (1881-1956) and, more recently, Saint Sophrony (Sakharov) of Essex (1896-1993), Fr John Romanides (1927-2001), Professor Georgios Mantzarides (whose paper is included in this edited collection), Fr Dumitru Stăniloae (1903-1993), Metropolitan Ierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos, Elder Ephraim of Vatopedi, Elder Theokletos Dionysiatos of Dionysiou and most of the other Elders at the Holy Mountain.

In addition, there is a significant philosophical basis for this. In my contribution to this edited collection of papers, you can see some of my worries about a hasty abolition of cultural borders and barriers. My views are the result of my later philosophical development and especially my post-doctoral teaching and research in the area of philosophy of culture (I have published relevant papers in the past in Greek and English, and I taught Philosophy of History, Culture and Civilisation at the Department of Philosophy of the National Kapodistriakon University of Athens and Wittgenstein Studies at the Department of Philosophy, University of Patras, between 2000 and 2004). Language and linguistic distinctions (as Wittgenstein has shown) cannot be taken light-heartedly. We need to be clear and focused in our discussions, otherwise, we may find ourselves in confusion and linguistic chaos which is evidence of poor thinking on these matters. A desire to make things look similar (even with noble intentions) should not interfere with our desire to keep a basic standard of academic rigour. And rigour is not about making distinctions lose their meaning. In particular, it is not about making clear philosophical and theological positions obscure; academic rigour is all about keeping things clear and informing the reader where the writer stands at all times. There is a level of honesty here and a desire to be brave (no matter the cost); these are virtues that academics sometimes forget. Sometimes, they favour complacency, avoiding confrontation and maintaining or even supporting the *status quo* at all cost; but, in doing this, they sacrifice truth and the desire to be true to their cause which should (ultimately) be to move forward in the academic pursuit of truth. Furthermore, as Wittgenstein (among many others) has shown, keeping things clear linguistically and conceptually, helps us find important links and differences in terms of cultural structures and outputs at the macro and micro levels (for more on Wittgenstein, see my two contributions in this edited work).

Of course, by supporting the idea that discussions of theological and philosophical contributions to Eastern and Western Christian perspectives should be kept distinct and clearly defined when approaching Palamas Studies, I do not claim that we should follow all the polemical aspects of views such as that promoted by Khomyakov (see Khomyakov

and Kireevsky 1999; Birkbeck 1895), where the East gains a character that is (at least in certain of its aspects) alien to what Palamas' theology and philosophy were all about. Palamas was very clear that there can be no division among (Orthodox) Christians in terms of cultural and/or national identities. In his *Homilies* and other parts of his work, he stresses that there cannot be a difference between a Greek and a non-Greek in terms of salvation. Note also that, when he was Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1347-1357/9), he carefully avoided sponsoring violence (by refusing to co-operate with the Zealots of Thessaloniki) and repeatedly called on the faithful under his care to provide help and show love to other people in their community, irrespective of creed, belief or colour (see π. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνού 1995).

I would also like to emphasise that the differences between East and West should not be oversimplified: in such an oversimplification, some scholars see the West as promoting ancient Greek rationalism and the East as being in opposition to this (see for an example of such an oversimplification, in a somewhat different setting, Inagaki and Jennings 2000). I argue in many places (and in my contributions here) that this is not (and should not) be so; such an oversimplification requires seeing ancient Greek philosophy through Kantian lenses, something which the ancient Greeks would not agree with. As is well known in the history of philosophy, Kant was one of the key modern figures who supported and propounded an essentially rationalist agenda in metaphysics, ontology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and religion. There were others before him who proceeded in this manner, but he is a key figure in the rationalist camp and provided a systematic discussion of what rationalism was capable of achieving in philosophy and religion. I argue that ancient Greek philosophy is essentially non-rationalist (non-rationalist at least when considered in terms of Kantian rationalism—see Athanasopoulos 2010; 2012a; 2015b). I differ here with a considerable number of commentators on ancient Greek philosophy (e.g., Korsgaard 1999; Serck-Hanssen and Emilsson 2010; Rescher 2013). But today, even in the West, some scholars hold that Plato and Aristotle should be interpreted more liberally (see Chappell 2012). My position in Ancient Greek Philosophy also brings me into opposition to some other claims made in the West regarding the debt owed by Palamas to the rationalism of Aristotle (e.g., Levy 2013). I would like here to emphasise that Aristotle's corpus in the East was more thoroughly and consistently studied and commented upon in its entirety. It has a long tradition of interpretation (through Byzantine commentators), which had already adorned this corpus with some very plausible readings by the time the young St Gregory Palamas started studying Aristotle's

Corpus under the guidance of Theodoros Metochites at the University of Constantinople (see further on this Athanasopoulos 2010; 2015). As such, the Aristotle that St Gregory Palamas knew of (and used in his confrontation with Varlaam) was far from anything scholars in the Latin West knew (and even far from what we can know of today). A lot of the scholarship that St Gregory Palamas was using is now lost due to the barbaric destruction of the libraries in Constantinople and other strongholds of Byzantine Civilisation by the Ottoman Turks during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The very few texts that the learned men of Constantinople brought with them from the East when they found refuge in the West were only a minuscule part of what had existed up to that time. To summarise this point: there are influences of Aristotelian character on the work of Palamas, but these would not be recognised as Aristotelian by Aquinas and other mediaeval philosophers and theologians. To think that Palamas was using what we today take as Aristotle is an oversimplification that destroys the academic rigour and preferred interpretation of the relevant texts (I discuss such an oversimplification concerning Palamas' use of Aristotelian logic - opposing K. Ierodiakonou's interpretation- in Athanasopoulos 2015b; incidentally, I am not the only one who supports that Medieval and contemporary readings of Aristotle lack the breadth of scope that Byzantine Aristotelian commentators had at the time of Palamas; see for some further bibliography on this Oehler, 1964; Lemerle, 1971; Benakis, 1988; Kotzabassi, 2002; Trizio, 2017).

The differences that place the East in opposition to the West in Palamas Studies are not restricted to a specific viewpoint within Orthodoxy; they encompass a much broader cultural differentiation (I discuss this further through a Wittgensteinian-based analysis in my contributions here; see also here Prof. Viorel Vizureanu's discussion of Fr Dumitru Staniloae's work). One could say summarily (using philosophers other than Wittgenstein) that the difference is based on a different Husserlian *Lebenswelten* (Husserl 1936/1970, pp.108-9). One may also see the difference through Gadamer's discussion of institutionalised theoretical prejudices (prejudice or *Vorurteil* in Gadamer is essential, along with authority and tradition, to understanding a given position, having a positive role that allows for a more successful interpretation of the relevant texts and authors); one may even use Gadamer's methodological union of prejudice with his concept of *Horizontlehre* as the key to approaching Palamas' texts (Gadamer 1993, p.306), in opposition to the views of Schleiermacher, Habermas, and others. Note that, when one sees the differences between East and West in this way, the "mental trap" that Fr

George Florovsky warns of (i.e., that many in the West allow themselves to get trapped into believing that the East is “backward”) can easily be avoided (Florovsky 1972, p.105). The Palamas Seminar will have the opportunity to further discuss these differences in terms of specific and quite different philosophies of culture between East and West in the future (we have started discussing these differences in terms of the texts of the *Philokalia* for 2019-2020; we had the first meeting in Braga in July 2019, and had further meetings in Pskov during November 2019, in Iasi during March 2020, and Veroia-Mt Athos in July 2020, which now has been postponed for July 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions).

Concerning these wide cultural differences between East and West, it would be useful to the reader to refer briefly to some differences in terms of the mystical and ascetic perspectives of the two traditions. The mystical and ascetical perspectives in the two traditions are quite different.

One may claim that the mystical approach in the West is based on two major schools of ancient Greek mysticism: on the one hand, we have the elaborations of the Neoplatonic emanations (*aporroia- απόρροια*), proposed by Plotinus, Philo, and Porphyry—especially Plotinus’ insistence that the One is both transcendent and immanent (see Rist 1989). This is, of course, an offshoot of earlier approaches, like the ones expressed in early Pythagorean, Eleatic, and Platonist views, mixed with ancient Greek mystical practices, such as those of the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries (Burkert 1987; Guthrie 1935). On the other, we have the Stoic approach of living life according to reason (*ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν*) and *oikeiosis* (*οἰκείωσις*; see Salles 2009; Long 2013; Meijer, 2007; Powers 2012). Again, here one can see influences from earlier Greek schools of thought: the Presocratics (for example, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and Heraclitus), middle and late Platonism, and, in some ways, the later offshoots of the Peripatetic (Aristotle) School (see Sedley 2002; Brink 1995; Sandbach 1985). These mystical influences have directed mystics in the West to turn their asceticism against their body (following here the Neoplatonists and especially Celsus’ critique of early Christian beliefs on the body and some later Stoic ideas; see Pick 1911; Hijmans 1959).

In the East, even though one can see influences from all the prior schools, one can also see a stronger influence from the Cappadocian Fathers (who, together with Paul’s Epistles, helped mystics in the East develop a particular kind of asceticism, quite distinct from the asceticism of the West) and the Areopagitic texts. The Areopagitic texts (with their distinct and peculiar character of symbolic use of matter and the body; see on this Athanasopoulos 2014) were widely used in the East more than two centuries before the time that Hilduin (c. 785- c. 855), Bishop of Paris, and

Johannes Scotus Erigena (815-877), the famous early mediaeval Irish monk and scholar, were ordered to translate them *en masse* into Latin (note that in 827 the Byzantine Emperor Michael II donated a major part of these manuscripts to Louis the Pious, the son of Charlemagne; see Schmidt-Biggemann 2005, p.245). This meant that the brand of mysticism (and accompanying asceticism) that developed in the East became a distinct brand with a peculiar character that was unique and different from the one that was developing in the West. This should be taken into serious consideration when one approaches the mysticism of the East. St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas (key protagonists in the mystical theology and mystical philosophy of the East and the hesychastic asceticism that they helped develop) do not just express any of the Christian brands of mysticism and asceticism that the West is familiar with, rather they express a particular Christian brand of mysticism and asceticism of the East, quite different from similar co-temporal, earlier or later developments in the West. So, if scholars, approaching this topic, do not take these differences into serious consideration, they end up making serious misinterpretations and distortions (see for some examples of these in Φλωρόφσκυ 1992; Romanides 2008; Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου (Βλάχου) 2012; Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου (Βλάχου) 2012-2013; Ρωμανίδη 2010). I hope to elaborate further on these differences more extensively in future work (for an example of what I think on this matter, see my contribution here comparing Meister Eckhart to Palamas and my paper on the differences between Aquinas and Palamas in Athanasopoulos 2015b). For now, let me offer you an example of the kind of misinterpretation of the brand of mysticism (and asceticism) found in the East that has taken place in the relatively recent past. It relates to a famous exchange between D. Balfour and St Sophronios of Essex.

David Balfour (1903-1989) was a Roman Catholic priest who became an Orthodox monk, priest, and Archimandrite (and Confessor to the Greek Royal family shortly before WWII). In 1941, he left the Orthodox Church and entered the British diplomatic and intelligence service. In 1962, he decided to be re-admitted to the Orthodox Church and died as an Orthodox layman. A key point in D. Balfour's turn to Orthodoxy was his meeting with St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938) at Holy Mt Athos in early 1932 at the Russian Holy Monastery of St Panteleimon (where St Silouan the Athonite and his spiritual son Elder Sophronios of Essex lived). From that time, he started writing letters to Elder Sophronios of Essex (1896-1993), who is now recognised as a Saint, asking for spiritual guidance on various issues. In one of these early letters (shortly before the end of 1932), he asked St Sophronios regarding the

famous Roman Catholic mystic John of the Cross (1542-1591). Balfour maintained that John of the Cross took a mystical approach to prayer and spiritual life that was similar to that of the Athonite hesychasts (see Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, Επιστολή 12, pp. 107-111; see also pp.117-122). Balfour, influenced by the mysticism of the Carmelites, thought that the two mystical practices were the same and offered arguments in support of this (asking St Sophronios to read the work “Dark Night of the Soul” to see for himself how close it is to mystical writings of the East). St Sophronios, in a very polite manner, dismissed the arguments offered by Balfour, guiding him to the mystical writings of St Symeon the New Theologian and other mystical writers of the East. St Sophronios insisted in his letters to David Balfour that the mystical theology of the East is based on a totally different ecclesiology and spiritual background than that of the West. St Sophronios stressed (both in his letters and in his overall attitude towards Balfour) that any true mystical illumination must be the product of sincere and deep compunction, a *nepsis* (esp. the cleansing of the soul with tears), and obedience in freedom to a spiritual guide. All this is only a prelude to a truly ecclesiastical mystical life in Christ, which includes full participation of the Eucharistic and other mysteries of the Church. Mystical life in the abstract and in a cognitive or intellectual manner (as can be found in John of the Cross’ *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *Dark Night*, see Howells 2002; 2013; 2017) would be a vain and fruitless attempt to approach God for the East and would lead one most certainly to spiritual demoralisation, insanity and self-destruction (see Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.16-18; 107-111; 117-122).

From this short encounter with the views of one of the key contemporary Orthodox mystical theologians who lived on Mt Athos for many years as a disciple of St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), living a hesychastic life and practicing the Jesus Prayer up to his death and recently recognised as a saint in the Orthodox Church (with a unanimous decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in November 2019), it is evident that a true mystical life for the East can only be a hesychastic life, fully immersed in *ascesis* (ἄσκησις) and *nepsis* (νήψις, a spiritual and bodily process of cleansing the passions and transforming them, so that a meaningful compunction is achieved, with endless tears and love for Christ). So, mysticism and asceticism, as they were and are experienced through *ascesis* and *nepsis* in the hesychastic way of life, become in this way the key to understanding the cultural difference between East and West (on the relation of Orthodox mysticism to hesychasm see Δεληγκωστοπούλου 2013, pp.271-281). But note that for the East, both mystical spiritual life and *ascesis* (which in the early period of the

development of hesychasm took the form of long fasts, long repetitions of the Jesus Prayer or as it is also known “Prayer of the Heart”, and full participation in long Church services every day) are not to be taken as purposes on their own: they serve as *stimuli* in the spiritual regeneration and concentration of the mind and the soul in the heart. This gathering and focusing of thoughts take place with the purpose of union with God, which is above anything that human language can express and above anything that the human mind can comprehend or imagine and which God will decide freely to complete via His energies (see on this John 16:12 and Paul’s 2 Corinthians 12 and the discussion of these passages in Romanides 2008; Metropolitan Hierotheos 2012-13). Further evidence can be found in most of the Fathers that the hesychasts referenced in their letters and treatises, such as St Gregory of Nyssa (esp. St Gregory of Nyssa, *Περί κατασκευής του ανθρώπου* or *De opificio hominis* and *Περί παρθενίας* or *De virginitate*); St Maximus the Confessor; St Symeon the New Theologian, and many others (Meredith 1999; Δελικωστοπούλου 2013, pp.271-281; Μαντζαρίδη 1998, pp.97-148; 225-254). A key component of the whole process (as St Sophronios of Essex, among other writers of the East claim) is freedom: absolute freedom for both God and man in their attempt to approach each other; for St Sophronios of Essex humans have to come to terms with their absolute freedom throughout their lives as a daily struggle, but they are able to use their freedom in their approach to God only through and with divine grace (Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.195-199; note that here St Sophronios’ position on freedom differs significantly from Duns Scotus’ relevant views on the use and purpose of freedom; see regarding this below).

Up to this point, we have examined the cultural background differences of Eastern from Western mysticism and asceticism. We also verified our intuitions regarding this cultural background in terms of evidence from the relevant patristic sources and the personal evidence that one of the key mystical theologians of this age, St Sophronios of Essex has provided in terms of his correspondence with David Balfour. We have identified freedom as a key area of differentiation. Before we proceed to an examination of the key issue of cultural differentiation between East and West in terms of the role of freedom in the theological and philosophical approach to salvation, let me refer briefly to a key historical factor that resulted in a deepening of the wide cultural differences between these two perspectives.

During April 1204, the armies of the Fourth Crusade besieged and sacked Constantinople (Nicolle 2011; Roudometof 2014). The destruction in people and property was immense. But the cultural trauma

was far greater. According to Steven Runciman “there was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade” (Runciman 1954, Vol.3, p. 130). The crusader armies that sacked Constantinople and the states that contributed to it (especially Venice which, according to S. Runciman, played a more sinister role than others), were particularly ruthless in their treatment of the Byzantines: Byzantine historiographers of the time (like Nicetas Choniates, in Greek: Νικήτας Χωνιάτης; c.1155-1217, who was a real person unlike the fictional one with the same name in Umberto Eco’s *Baudolino*) give vivid depictions of the destruction of churches, monasteries, and libraries, the rapes of nuns and the looting of treasures and holy relics, which were used to adorn buildings, churches, and squares in the West (see for example the Roman era bronze horses that were taken from the Hippodrome in Constantinople to adorn the terrace of St Mark’s Basilica in Venice or the precious holy altar of the great Church of St Sophia in Constantinople, that is at the bottom of the sea with the shipwrecked Venetian ship that was carrying it to Venice; see Χωνιάτης 1975). The desolation and pain of the sacking of Constantinople were followed by a 60-year ruthless occupation of Byzantine lands which included mainland Greece and the islands of the Ionian and Aegean seas (Phillips 2004). The liberation of Constantinople by the Byzantines of Nicaea in 1261 did little to lift their spirits and they had to wait a further 20 years to see some of the previous glory reinstated in the rest of mainland Greece and the islands (see Runciman 1954, vol.3, pp. 114-123; Vryonis 1967; Χωνιάτης 1975, pp. 583-635, 637-655). The siege and the occupation by the Crusaders left a deep emotional and cultural scar on the collective memory of the Orthodox, intensifying the cultural divide that had already started with the schism of the ninth century (reports of the vandalism by the Crusaders spread as far as Russia and there are documents from that time across the Balkans and the Slavic countries that confirm this transnational culture-wide trauma; see for example the documents cited at the work of Maiorov, 2016).

Why freedom is so important in the East?

Perhaps one of the key issues in the debates about the differences between East and West is the amount of freedom one is prepared to allow for God and humans in their interaction for salvation. Freedom, as a concept, was discussed at length in ancient Greek philosophy, where it was often opposed to the concept of fate, but also included political and moral freedom (see Stalley 1994; Stalley 1998; Chappell 1995). Note that in the Orthodox patristic literature emphasis is placed on *proairesis*

(*προαίρεσις*) and not on freedom of the will (*ελευθερία βουλήσεως*) for achieving *synergeia* (*συνέργεια*) in salvation; “*προαίρεσις*” and “*τα εφ’ ἡμῖν*” as concepts connected to freedom were discussed at length in ancient Greek philosophy, esp. by Plato, the Peripatetic School, and the Stoics, and by political orators such as Lysias, Demosthenes, and Aeschines, who primarily connected them to the political sense of freedom (which has been in wide cultural discussion among the Greeks from the very first steps of Hellenic Civilisation – see for example Ηροδότου VII 104: *Ελεύθεροι γάρ εόντες οὐ πάντα ελεύθεροι εἰσὶ. Εστὶ γάρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος*; Δημοκρίτου απ. 821 F: “*Ελευθερίας δ’ ὅσον οἱ κρατούντες νέμονται τοῖς δῆμοις μέτεστι καὶ το πλείων ἰσὼς οὐκ ἀμεινον*”; see further in Raaflaub 2004). The amount of freedom one allows for God and humans in their interaction, for many (including myself) is another key difference between the East and West; (again) this is something that has been forgotten or seriously disregarded in contemporary discussions of hesychasm, mysticism and asceticism. Freedom (*ελευθερία* as *προαίρεσις*, *το εφ’ ἡμῖν* and *αυτεξούσιον*) for the Orthodox is not only the key to understanding the reason for the provision of choice in Paradise (*Genesis* 3), and many other divine actions throughout the Holy Bible, but also the *sine qua non* of wider Orthodox mysticism, asceticism, and cultural understanding of salvation and deification (*theosis*) or glorification (for some interesting connections between Orthodox mysticism and asceticism and the political realm see Papanikolaou 2012 and Brown Dewhurst 2018). There is a long and very strong lineage of ascetic biblical and patristic literature stressing this.

Biblical references include the psalms (e.g., Psalm 61), the Gospels (e.g., Mark 8:34; and the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32), and the Letters of the Apostles (1 Corinthians 9:24–25; Romans 8:21; Jude 1:3; James 2:14–26). Note that, repeatedly, both Jesus and St Paul discuss the life of the faithful in Christ as radically different from the life of the people who are bound by the Law of Moses (see for example most notably the parables of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector in Luke 18:9–14 and St Paul’s discussion of a relevant theme in Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”).

Patristic references include the Cappadocians (John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa in particular; see Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, *Κατηχητικὸς Λόγος*, PG45, 24CD; Harrison 1992; Bradshaw 2011), the Desert Fathers, St Isaac the Syrian (see his 16th and 22nd *Ascetical Orations*), St John the Damascene (who relates freedom as “*αυτεξούσιο*” to the image of God (*κατ’ εἰκόνα το νοερόν δηλοῖ καὶ το αυτεξούσιον*- PG94, 320), and St

Maximus the Confessor (see Maximus *Amb.* 42; PG91 1316C-D; Maximus *Pyrrh.* PG91 292D-293B; see also the relation to “το ἐφ’ ἡμῖν” in Maximus *Ep.* 2 PG91 396C; Maximus *Ep.* 2 PG91 405A; Bathrellos 2004; Törönen 2007; Loudovikos 2010). References we also find in St John of the Ladder, St Symeon the New Theologian, and of course St Gregory Palamas, along with more modern and contemporary saints (most notably St Porphyrios Kapsokalyvitis, 1906-1991, St Paisios of Mt Athos, 1924-1994, St Silouan the Athonite and St Sophronios of Essex – we discussed the last two earlier concerning differences between the mysticism and asceticism of the West and the East). For many of the hesychasts (St Gregory Palamas included), belief in the absolute ontological, epistemological, and ethical senses of freedom that both God and humans have (with God significantly greater than human) are key to safeguarding monastic and layman asceticism from the perils of misguided mysticism and asceticism. Absolute freedom is one of the ontological, epistemological and ethical characteristics that humans share with God, and, as such, any attempt to reduce or restrict the freedom of humans (or God) is an attempt to reduce or restrict the mystery of both creation and salvation.

St Gregory Palamas, discusses freedom in various parts of his works and in a variety of ways; one could highlight as an example of Palamas’ thought on this his *Oration on the Annunciation of the Theotokos* (*Ομιλία* ΙΔ΄, PG151, 176D; PG151, 172BC). Agreeing here with St Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662), Palamas sees that the absolute sense of freedom that both Christ and man share exists in fullness in the Mother of God (Theotokos) and the saints, who, in using their *προαίρεσις*¹, go beyond the ontological, epistemological and ethical limitations of their desire (*ὄρεξις*), will (*βούλησις*) and judgement (*κρίσις*) unifying them in their act of salvation through *and with* divine grace (Τσελεγγίδη 2000, 2002; Μαντζαρίδη 1998, pp.97-148; 225-254; for St Maximus’ views on freedom see the works of Loudovikos 2010; Bathrellos 2004; Törönen 2007; Bradshaw 2010). Palamas’ emphasis on this ontological, epistemological and ethical sense of freedom is of such a peculiar

¹ Note here that St Gregory Palamas uses a philosophically charged technical concept from both the Peripatetic and the Stoic schools to refer to freedom; see for example, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1111b-1112a; 113a10-12: «...καὶ ἡ προαίρεσις ἂν εἴη βουλευτική ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐκ τοῦ βουλευέσθαι γὰρ κρίναντες ὀρεγόμεθα κατὰ τὴν βούλευσιν» (see also Ross 1923; Σκαλτσᾶς, 1993); Epictetus’ *Diss.* 1.1.23 (for further discussion of *προαίρεσις* in Epictetus see Mason and Scaltsas 2007). For a comparison between Aristotle and Epictetus see Δραγώνα-Μονάχου 1978-9.

character that many in the West (even with a pro-Orthodox orientation) find it difficult to understand not only concerning Palamas' texts, but also in relation to texts of St Maximus the Confessor (for example, see the work of Farrell 1989 and the criticism of some of its main contentions by Fr John Romanides and Metropolitan Ierotheos of Nafpaktos; see Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου 2012; Romanides 1992), texts of St Gregory of Nyssa and other texts of many Byzantine authors (see on this Φλωρόφσκυ 1992).

In the West, there were distinct episodes in medieval philosophy and theology when the issue of freedom became important; but, overall, Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers followed the compatibilist (i.e., restricted freedom) views of Augustine (354-430; for further on Augustinian compatibilism see the works of Rogers 2004; Couenhoven 2013). Examples of such Augustinian lineage include the views of Anselm (1033-1109) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153); the discussion of Augustine's *liberum arbitrium* by Peter Lombard (1095-1160) and Albert the Great (1200-1280); and lastly the famous opposition of Duns Scotus (c.1260-1308) and Ockham (c.1287-1347) to Aquinas (1224/6-1274; see Osborne 2012). Aquinas, in his systematic and scholastic expositions, tried to unite the intuitions of Augustine and Aristotle (see, for example, the criticisms of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham on Aquinas' approach of relating *habitus* and freedom; for a discussion sympathetic to Aquinas on this issue, see the work of Cessario 1991). Most of the scholastics (except Duns Scotus and Ockham and their admirers) followed or were significantly influenced by Augustine's solution to the problem of freedom of the will. Duns Scotus, Ockham, and, much later, Louis de Molina (1535-1600) tried to formulate more creative and imaginative approaches to the Augustinian solution; for this reason, they could be considered *extreme libertarians* (with Professor Alexander Broadie calling Duns Scotus "the great philosopher of freedom in the Middle Ages"), allowing for a more liberal idea of freedom than Augustinian thought permitted (Broadie 1995; Williams 1998; Osborne 2012); however, even this (more liberal) interpretation is disputed (Ingham 2001; Freddoso 1988; Gaskin 1994) and, at any rate, Duns Scotus and Ockham did not manage to draw sufficient followers in the West to warrant a rejection of the claim that there was a medieval conformity to the views of Augustine on the issue (for example, see the case of Molina, who caused a major controversy in Spain, forcing Pope Clement VIII in 1594 to impose silence on open discussion of his views). Even though Augustine's views on sin and freedom were widely accepted in the West, for the East they were considered too restrictive and not related to *freedom simpliciter* (i.e.,

properly understood as *αὐτεξούσιον- προαίρεσις*). In the East, as indicated above, there was more emphasis on the Cappadocians and St Maximus the Confessor (on the significant differences between Augustine and Maximus see Bradshaw 2010). St Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts criticised Augustine sharply for the quite problematic soteriological consequences of his compatibilism (Ρωμανίδη 2010; Τσελεγγίδη 2000 and 2002; see on the recently re-surfaced disputed issue of Palamas' relation to Augustine regarding Palamas' 150 Chapters the work of Μητροπολίτη Ιεροθέου, 2009).

In the East, today more than ever, the ontological, epistemological, ethical and eschatological senses of freedom (as *ἐλευθερία* or as *αὐτεξούσιον- προαίρεσις*) are considered of paramount importance in our attempt to correctly understand and interpret many aspects of Orthodox philosophy and theology (see for example Yannaras 1984; Τσελεγγίδης 2002; Ρωμανίδη 2010; Δεληκωνσταντή 1997). In the case of St Gregory Palamas, in particular, this has a key philosophical and theological importance that can help us understand his mysticism and asceticism (Τσελεγγίδης 2000; Μαντζαρίδης 1998, pp.225-254). Contemporary hesychastic monastics think that freedom in-Christ (*ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερία*), in all its forms (freedom from thinking with the flesh, freedom from natural necessity, freedom from death, freedom from worldly thoughts) is essential for a true Orthodox ascetic life and union with Christ (Γέροντας Γεώργιος Καψάνης 1988). They also think that all Orthodox ecclesiology and indeed all Orthodox theology becomes meaningless without freedom (Γέροντας Βασίλειος Γοντικάκης 1987; Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου 2004, pp.195-199; Αρχιμ. Ζαχαρία 2015, pp. 390-408).

The reader will find more discussion on all these issues in the papers that follow. But, before I start with a summary of some of the arguments in the papers contained in this collection, I will provide a few words about the Palamas Seminar and what it tries to achieve. As this work was produced through a joint collaborative research effort, it will be helpful to the reader to understand the aims of this effort and the background of some of the papers.

Palamas Seminar: A collaborative research effort into the philosophy and theology of St Gregory Palamas

There were several key events that made it possible to think about creating this collaborative effort and research forum and organising its first steps. The successful International Conference on the Philosophy and Theology of St Gregory Palamas (Thessaloniki-Veroia-Holy Mt Athos) in

March 2012 brought together more than 80 scholars (philosophers, theologians, specialists in political philosophy and law, historians, and theorists of art and culture) from Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, and the Americas to discuss key issues in Palamas Studies. In this conference, many new friendships were created and the three founders of the Palamas Seminar met and started discussing the possibility of developing this project. During the Round Table on St Gregory Palamas' Philosophy at the World Congress of Philosophy in Athens (August 2013), a further discussion took place. Finally, at the International Conference on Meister Eckhart and St Gregory Palamas (St Petersburg State University, St Petersburg, Russia, June 2014), ongoing discussion made it possible for the three founding members, Dr. C. Athanasopoulos (UK and Greece), Professor Dan Chitoiu (State University of Iasi/Romanian Academy), and Professor Oleg Dushin (State University of St Petersburg, Russia), to solidify their vision and propose and accept certain key principles and a plan of action (with the first Palamas Seminar Conference organised in Veroia and Mt Athos in 2015; the collection of papers here contains most of the papers read at the Veroia 2015 Conference).

We decided to create a collaborative research forum with open membership and with the intention of meeting in different places (so that as many scholars as possible can join us) to discuss aspects of the philosophy and theology of St Gregory Palamas with a view to exploring plausible interpretations of Palamas' texts and possible applications of Palamas' philosophy and theology to our contemporary world. A key principle of the seminar is that all possible effort should be expended in organising conferences, so that research can be presented and discussed in a courteous academic manner with the purpose of highlighting plausible readings of Palamas' texts and criticising misinterpretations, fake texts and poorly supported overviews of the consequences and impact of his philosophy and theology. We also decided that our efforts should include the codification and publication of plausible and scholarly, yet approachable, interpretations of Palamas' texts, beginning with the presentations of the conferences we organise. Finally, a key principle that was decided was to avoid ethnocentrism in our discussions: Palamas is for all humanity (Orthodox and non-Orthodox), regardless of national boundary, language and/or country. Palamas' works, Orthodox in character and written in the defence of Orthodox monastic practices, do not only belong to the Orthodox but are a universal cultural achievement, in the same way that Holy Mt Athos (the thousand-year-old "garden of Virgin Mary"), as a monastic community with 20 monasteries, was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1988, on the basis that "it

is an irreplaceable source of life and inspiration, belonging to all the peoples of the world, irrespectively of the territory in which they are located”.

All researchers into the work of Palamas are welcome to participate in our discussions and present their views in the Palamas Seminar in a respectful manner, with the purpose of creating a space for international discussion that can move across countries and provide a fruitful forum for exchanging ideas on interpretations and applications of St Gregory Palamas’ philosophy and theology. A website has been set up to inform the general public about the conferences that have taken place (<http://www.athanasopouleion.gr/en/node/12>). In the first four years of its operation, the Palamas Seminar organised more than six very successful conferences in Greece, Russia, Romania, and Portugal, attracting more than 160 speakers in total. After the first conference, we have discussed the following topics: Social Perspectives in St Gregory Palamas’ Philosophy and Theology (Neamt 2016); Hesychasm and Asceticism (Pskov 2017); the Role of the Jesus Prayer in Palamas’ Texts (Neamt 2018); Lossky and Palamas (Pskov 2018); Philokalia and Palamas (Braga 2019); the Ethics and Aesthetics of Philokalia (Pskov November 2019). For 2020, we met in Romania (Iassi, March 2020) to discuss the Romanian Philokalia and its relation to St Gregory Palamas, and we planned to meet in Veroia-Mt Athos to discuss Philokalia and Palamas (July 2020; this has been postponed for July 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions). Further to these actions, we decided with our collaborator Professor Viorel Vizureanu (from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest) to call for papers on the Philosophy of Philokalia (which we hope to publish in the Annals of the University of Bucharest sometime in 2021/22).

The papers contained in this collection

This collection (most of the presentations here were presented at the Veroia 2015 Conference) is divided into three major parts, each part reflecting a key interest: a) Theology; b) Philosophy; and c) Social Theory and Art. We start with the Letter of His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Veroia, Naoussa and Campagna, Mr. Penteleimon, who sets the hesychastic and ascetical tone of the collection. We close with an appendix, which contains the Letter of the Very Revd, Archimandrite Palamas, Abbot of the Monastery of the All-Holy Virgin Mary of Kallipetra, which provides justification for the recognition of the Palamas family as saints by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In the section entitled Theology, there are three contributions. In the first, Professor Georgios Mantzarides (Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Theology, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki) examines in detail the way that Palamas' theology is influenced by his hesychastic *theoptia* and practice. Mantzarides, being a specialist in Christian ethics and having widely researched patristic theology and Palamas' texts, provides a unique Orthodox theological perspective on the relation between *ascesis*, *hesychia* and theology. He puts forward the important thesis that any Christian theology that is not a hesychastic theology remains idle talk; it can only serve as a futile form of academic theology and can be an academic theology (in a positive sense) only when it is joined with humility. Furthermore, he proves, with detailed references to important Fathers of the Church, that, the usual methods of academic theology, when applied to the Fathers, cannot bring any real change to Christian theology and the Church. Mantzarides elaborates here on the contributions of St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas regarding the mystical "fire of *hesychia*", providing an excellent discussion of how Orthodox mysticism is united with Orthodox asceticism and concluding in this: "The Church can find the solution to its problems only by approaching and partaking of this fire, only through its experience; hesychasm becomes then the only authentic source of a meaningful change in the Church".

Fr Marian Vild (Professor of Theology at the University of Bucharest) continues the theological discussion in this part of the book with an important thesis about the pastoral and ecclesiastical purpose of the use of biblical exegesis and interpretation by St Gregory Palamas in his *Homilies*. Outlining the foundations of a truly Orthodox biblical hermeneutics, Fr Marian insists that such a hermeneutics has to be inspired by St Gregory Palamas' efforts to guide Orthodox biblical hermeneutics through a process of continuous actualisation: to approach and unite with God, through the lived experience of the Church's mysteries and ecclesiastical life. In this way, hermeneutics is guided by lived experience. This section ends with a contribution by Fr Liviu Barbu.

Fr Liviu Barbu outlines the background of the reception of hesychasm in Romania and highlights the contribution of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae as a key factor in the revival of interest in Palamas Studies in Romania today. His detailed study (including references to yet unpublished work of scholars in Romania) is illuminating for all readers interested in the latest theological developments in Orthodox Romania. A large part of his contribution investigates the specifics of *Philokalia*. I would like to note here that Palamas Seminar has started investigating in

more detail these specifics and especially the importance and significance of *Philokalia* for contemporary Philosophy and the Theology in a series of meetings from 2019 to 2021 and related publications.

The Philosophy section starts with my two contributions. Written at two different times of my philosophical development, they show my key interest in Palamas' mysticism and asceticism as evidenced (primarily) in his hesychastic treatises and orations. My comparison of the mysticisms of Eckhart and Palamas shows my early fascination with Wittgenstein's hinges and their potential use in convincing sceptics to accept the possibility of a direct mystical experience of God. This work also shows my ongoing culturally differentiating approach to the two different cultural perspectives on mysticism that can be found in these two protagonists of Christian theology and philosophy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In my investigation into the problem of salvation, I examine (what I take to be) the "Greek Agenda" on the problem of salvation and its solution by Palamas; I also support the view that hinges are a futile device in convincing sceptics, who do not share the same cultural context (in this case, hesychasm). Both of my contributions discuss aspects of Palamas' mysticism and asceticism and highlight the extreme difficulty in bringing the East close to the West on cultural-specific and philosophical grounds, using Wittgenstein's texts and contemporary scholarship on Wittgenstein, as my support. I hope my contributions here will prove to be interesting for both Palamas' scholars and Wittgenstein enthusiasts. For more information on how I view ancient Greek ethics and St Gregory Palamas' solutions to problems inherent in Greek ethics, one could consult my more recent work on the problem of salvation (Athanasopoulos 2018) where there is a more detailed analysis of the problems I find in Aristotle's account of *eudaimonia* and how hesychasm and asceticism can be seen as the solution to inherent problems in *eudaimonia*, *apatheia*, and *ataraxia*.

The philosophical discussion continues with the contribution of Professor Dan Chițoiu (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Iasi and one of the three co-founders of Palamas Seminar). He finds that Palamas' emphasis on the experience of deification can be the basis for a comparison with what has been termed "radical phenomenology" in the philosophy of science and epistemology. Using Henry's phenomenological analysis and his anti-theoretical arguments in epistemology, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of science, Professor Chițoiu provides a very interesting comparison, highlighting the relevance of Palamas for contemporary phenomenological discussions of religion.

The discussion of Henry is continued and taken to a deeper level of analysis with the contribution of Professor Fr Manuel Sumares. Fr

Manuel (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Porto) starts with a brief examination of what Palamas considers to be the key error of Greek philosophers and uses this as the background against which he examines, in detail, Henry's discussion of the problems that Cartesian philosophy (primarily), as expressing modernity, has given us; his discussion of Henry is detailed and profound, and undoubtedly will make all Henry's sympathisers look very favourably upon Palamas' efforts to defend hesychasm. Professor Viorel Vizureanu (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest) investigates the theological and cultural significance of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae's recovery of Palamas' thinking for Romanian spirituality. He claims that this recovery of Palamas' thinking went along a parallel path to Fr Dumitru's efforts to translate the *Philokalia* into Romanian and, in this way, directed Romanian spirituality towards a more hesychastic path, influencing other theologians in the Orthodox world to develop their efforts along similar lines. Professor Vizureanu's paper is similar to my two contributions in this book in that both I and Professor Vizureanu propose a new cultural analysis and philosophy of culture that we need to develop further so that we can better understand the significance of Palamas' philosophy and theology. Undoubtedly, however, most of the papers contained in this collection have something to say concerning Philosophy of Culture. The first section papers work out the theological connotations of this philosophy, the second present exemplifications of what this philosophy of culture can be, and the third present social and artistic elaborations of the philosophy that I needed.

A few words on the issue of what Philosophy of Culture entails might be appropriate here. As a philosophical field and discipline, the philosophy of culture is still in its infancy. Perhaps it started as a concept in the Ancient Greeks (see for example relative remarks in Homer's depiction of the Shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, Herodotus' *Ἰστορίαι*, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Plato's *Protagoras*, and Aristotle's *Politics*) and as a term "culture" exists from the time of the Romans (one of the first uses perhaps is with Cicero who wrote about the cultivation of the soul or "*cultura animi*" in his *Tusculanae Disputationes*). In late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Renaissance in both West and East we have attempted to think philosophically and theologically about history, culture, and time. However, there is little progress for the field of Philosophy of Culture as such till 17th and 18th c. Perhaps with Pufendorf and other early modern philosophers (like Rousseau and Kant) we have some vague idea of what this subfield can be (Velkley 2002). However, philosophers start seriously thinking about this

separate domain as a separate field of philosophy from the time Edward B. Tylor published *Primitive Culture* (1871) and Franz Boas published *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911). During the last couple of centuries, many philosophical schools have studied aspects of culture (Kantians, Hegelians, the Frankfurt School, Marxists, phenomenologists, existentialists, structuralists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists, etc.). However, today, philosophers are still discussing the content, methods, and boundaries of the field termed “philosophy of culture”. In the last thirty or so years, research into language and culture, feminist philosophy, African philosophy, social ecology, and also the philosophy of virtual worlds (both at micro and macro levels) has brought the philosophy of culture again to the forefront of discussions about culture (see White 2002; Appiah 1992; Tosam and Takov 2016; O’Hear 1998; Cohen 1995; Floridi 2015). I hope that our contributions here will further support the revival of philosophical interest in this field. To further this cultural discussion, the Palamas Seminar will organise philosophical, theological and wider cultural discussions regarding the relation of the *Philokalia* to Palamas in 2019-2021 (Braga in July 2019, Pskov in November 2019, Iasi in March 2020 and Veroia-Mt Athos in July 2020; this has been postponed for July 2021 due to COVID19 restrictions). In addition, with the collaboration of the Faculty of Philosophy at Bucharest, there will be a call for papers on the philosophy of the *Philokalia* in 2019/2020, with the Palamas Seminar aiming to produce three to four relevant volumes of contributions by the end of 2021/22 from all these efforts. These activities will provide (we hope) a basis for more detailed studies of Orthodox culture and spirituality in the future.

The final section of this book has two very interesting contributions that highlight the social and artistic significance of Palamite asceticism and mysticism. First, we have the contribution of Professor John Farina (Professor of Religious Studies at George Mason University, USA), who stresses that we need a new philosophical and theological discourse to support the social change that we need if we are to survive as a species. This new discourse, he finds, should be different from a specific kind of homiletics predominant in Orthodox and Roman Catholic practical philosophy and practical theology. Making an interesting comparison between Jacques Maritain and Palamas, he stresses that social ethics in both cultures has suffered from an undue dedication to moral platitudes and poor generalisations that serve no ontological and eschatological purpose. He finds that Palamas’ social ethics and social philosophy and theology brings fresh air to the debates, providing profound Christocentric moral categories and analysis of our moral life.

Next, we have the interesting work of Dr Spyridon Panagopoulos (Ionian University, Greece), who discusses in great detail the hesychastic iconography of the Cretan School and especially the art of Theophanes the Cretan. With a detailed reference to the theological analysis offered in the *Homilies* of St Gregory Palamas and detailed descriptions of the mystical and symbolic role that colours, shadows, and shapes play in this iconography, Dr Panagopoulos provides an informed discussion of Theophanes' *Icon of Transfiguration* and shows the depth and richness of the cultural outputs of the time.

In the end, there is an appendix, where the reader may find the Letter that the Fathers at the Holy Monastery of Theotokos at Kallipetra in the Skete Veroias, led by the Very Revd Archimandrite Palamas, sent to His Eminence, Metropolitan Panteleimon, to ask the Metropolis and the Ecumenical Patriarchate for official recognition of the family of Palamas as saints. This adds a wonderful example to our discussion of Palamas' mysticism and asceticism.

The example of the family of St Gregory Palamas (his father Constantios, his mother Kali, his two brothers Theodosios and Makarios, and his two sisters Epicharis and Theodoti), the members of which were recognised as saints in 2009 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and are now celebrated on their Feast Day of December 18, provides a wonderful example of how the family dimension of mysticism and asceticism is expressed in Orthodox hagiography. Contrary to most common definitions of Christian mysticism of the thirteenth century (for example see the definition provided by Bernard McGinn in McGinn 1998, p.26), we find here the transformation of a whole family and not just a single person. How the mysticism and asceticism of one influenced a whole family, is something that needs further cultural, philosophical, and theological investigation. Beyond any doubt, the father of the family (Constantios) and the mother (Kali) influenced their children in their choices and life habits. Further investigation is needed in relation to how one of the children of the family (St Gregorios) was influenced by the rest in pursuing a hesychastic mode of monasticism. It is also noteworthy that the only one of the whole family who pursued an academic education at the University of Constantinople was St Gregorios. Was this a result of a conscious choice of all the other children or due to specific circumstances? Finally, this mode of family-based mystical and ascetic life is often disregarded in many studies of mysticism in the West. Even scholars from the West that approach the philosophy and theology of St Gregory Palamas often forget that Palamas' mysticism and asceticism have this family background and dimension. This emphasis on the family background and context of

mysticism and asceticism in the East is probably because, in the East, spiritual Fathers form a spiritual family bond with their spiritual children (see for example how the spiritual children of St Joseph the Hesychast, who was recognised as a saint in October 2019, write about each other in Κατσάνης επιμ. 2007).

We hope that more philosophical and cultural studies of family-based mysticism and asceticism, as was and is experienced in the East, will follow in the future (note that Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex has written on the way a family of Orthodox Christians should resemble the life of an Orthodox monastery; see Αρχιμ. Ζαχαρία, 2015, pp.13-25).

For now, we will just note that it is not a rare phenomenon in Orthodox hagiography to have families of saints (see for example the families of St Gregory the Theologian and St Basil the Great, the family of St Xenophon, who lived in the 6th c., St Sophia and her daughters and so on). It is also a historical and cultural fact of later Byzantine and post-Byzantine Greece that many families in Northern Greece (esp. in Macedonia) took on the name Palamades long after the death of the actual members of the Palamas family. The famous Greek poet Kostis Palamas (1859-1943), comes from such a family; his family traveled from Northern Greece to Mesologgi, producing monastics (like Monk Panaretos Palamas, 1834-1891, who renovated the monasteries of St Eleoussa and St Agatha outside Mesologgi, and Monk Michael Palamas the Ascetic), and intellectuals like Panayiotis Palamas (1722-1803), who was the founder of the Palamas School of Mesologgi.

Closing my introduction, I would like to note my gratitude first to the Lord, who allowed me in His infinite mercy to finish this project. I am also indebted to my surviving family for their ongoing support during my long self-imposed exile in the UK. My sincere thanks also go to the Fathers and Sisters, in many places, who have me in their prayers and my collaborators at the Palamas Seminar for their continuing participation and help in the organisation of events. Special thanks are owed to His Eminence, Metropolitan Panteleimon of Veroia for his abundant blessings, the Very Revd. Abbot Palamas, his fellow monks and their collaborators for their hard work at Kallipetra, and the Soumela Pilgrim Centre in Vermion for allowing us to host the Conference at their facilities. Finally, I would like to thank Mr Rob Tenniel for proofreading the texts and the Cambridge Scholars Publishing team for collaborating with me in this project.

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1. HESYCHASM AND THEOLOGY¹

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Abstract: My work here clarifies the Orthodox theological term “*hesychia*” and relates it to specific Orthodox Christian uses of the terms “asceticism” and “theology”. The Orthodox use of the term *hesychia*, when related to specific biblical and patristic references, makes explicit its dynamic character, and in this way, it transforms it into a unique term in Christian Theology, quite different when compared to other (non-Orthodox) uses. Contrary to recent attempts to reduce the meaning, scope, and depth of *hesychia*, it is argued here that *hesychia* can be the only authentic source for a meaningful change in the Christian Church and Christian Theology.

Keywords: hesychia, theoptia, theologia, theoria, Palamas, St Symeon the New Theologian, St Basil the Great.

Hesychasm is not simply a theological trend nor an ecclesiastical system but a phenomenon that transcends trends and systems. Furthermore, hesychasm cannot be limited to any particular period in the history of monasticism, such as, for example, that of the fourteenth century when the erudite Varlaam of Calabria turned against the monks of Holy Mt Athos and caused the famous *hesychastic controversy*. Hesychasm is the cultivation of *hesychia* (in the original Greek *ἡσυχία*), a unique and diachronic characteristic of Orthodox monasticism. But what are the content and true form of *hesychia*?

Hesychia is most commonly identified with stillness, in opposition to restlessness; or it is considered as having the same meaning as relaxation or resting (in opposition to being busy or doing any kind of work). In other words, it is frequently considered to be an exterior and primarily physical state, without some special spiritual or mental content and immediate relation to the interior, mental and spiritual, human life.

¹ Translation: Dr C. Athanasopoulos 2017.

This usual (physical or bodily) sense is synonymous with what the Holy Fathers call *argia* (ἀργία i.e., not working, remaining idle) and cannot be associated with what they term *hesychia*. In the Orthodox tradition, *hesychasm* has a very distinct meaning, which is quite different from what many scholars think. It is not (simply) stillness, nor (simply) rest. It is not considered to be some kind of common social activity, nor even just one of the moral (Christian or other social) virtues. *Hesychia* is the “higher endeavour” (Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, *Λόγος εις εαυτόν* 26, 7; PG35, 1237B) and the “most perfect of the virtues” (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15, 1 in Darrouzès 1967, p.444). It is the path that leads to divine knowledge, the goal of which is *theoria* (θεωρία) or the vision of God. The virtues, which are called “the fulfilment of the divine commands through work” are only the first stage and a part of the pre-requisites for keeping oneself on the path towards *theoria*. According to Symeon the New Theologian: “The Apostles and the Holy Fathers who were ordained by them did not see *hesychia* as more important than the good works [i.e., the virtues] but, showing their faith through the fulfilment of the [divine] commands, they became worthy of God’s love in [divine] knowledge. Also, as they lawfully competed and always kept the knowledge of God in love, as the prize of their victory in continuously wishing to be with Him, they stayed outside the arena of worldly pursuits and the restlessness of the turmoil of worldly endeavours. Furthermore, by competing lawfully, they remained without care and involvement with worldly affairs that can only bring pain and sorrow” (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15, 153-162 in Darrouzès 1967, pp.454-456).

Hesychia was never preferred to having obedience to the commandments in the life of the Church. Furthermore, any disregard for keeping the commandments is considered to be the opposite of *hesychia*. The *hesychast* (i.e., the one who has *hesychia*), driven by his love towards God, faithfully keeps God’s commands and so becomes worthy of the knowledge of God. The one who is in *hesychia* has an intense desire to remain in God’s love that overcomes him and, in this way, he stays away from the arena of turmoil and worldly-caused restlessness, embracing the “Holy Fire” of *hesychia*, a point which allows him to “listen carefully to Jesus’ *hesychia*” (Ιγνατίου Αντιοχείας, *Προς Εφεσίους* 15, 2). For this reason, the model and prototype of the *hesychastic* life in Orthodox *hesychasm* is the Mother of God who embraces in her arms the Holy Fire: Jesus Christ (*Απολυτίκιον Παναγίας Παραμυθίας*).

Keeping the commandments is the manifestation of the love of man towards God and brings man closer to the knowledge of God: “He who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one

who loves me is going to be loved by my father; I love him, and I will show myself to him” (John 14:21). But, this condition of mental and spiritual hesychasm is greater in importance than keeping the commandments. While keeping the commandments, which is most commonly termed *praxis* in the ascetic tradition, can lead one to *theoria* (which for the Fathers of the Church is the knowledge and vision of God), mental and spiritual *hesychia* is, in essence, the condition in which divine *theoria* is achieved and without which *theoria* cannot exist. This condition of mental and spiritual *hesychia* can only be reached through a continuous concentration of the mind and avoidance of worldly distractions. It is for this reason that St John of Sinai (St John of the Ladder), the teacher of hesychasm, stipulates, as the first step in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the renunciation of all worldly pursuits (*ἀποταγή*). No one, he writes, can enter the heavenly bridal chamber if he does not achieve the triple renunciation: a) of things and humans; b) of one’s own will; and c) of vanity and vainglory (Ιωάννου Σιναΐτου, *Κλίμαξ* 2, 14; PG88, 657A).

Naturally, to live in *hesychia* one should exist in an appropriate external environment. One cannot achieve *hesychia* within the turmoil and noise of worldly-oriented life pursuits. This is true, more than ever, for current patterns of life, even though there are notable exceptions. *Hesychia* is primarily a condition of the soul; more particularly of the mind. When the human mind stops being distracted by worldly affairs through the sense organs, it comes back into itself and, through itself, “it ascends to thoughts about God” (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Επιστολή* 2, 2; PG32, 228A). *Hesychia* is primarily lived in isolation and the desert. This is the reason that some of the greatest Hesychasts usually lived in the desert and/or in isolation for a major part of their lives.

In relation to coming close to God and divine knowledge, there is a frequent reference to the Psalm verse: “be still and know that I am God” (Ψαλμ. 45, 11: “σκολάσατε καὶ γνῶτε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ Θεός”; KJV: 46: 10: “Be still, and know that I am God”). This is often taken as referring to an exterior stillness. Here the noun *scholē* (σχολή), and the verb used in the Psalm, which is a derivative of this noun (in the original Greek of the Seventy this is: *σχολάσατε*) are taken to refer to abstinence from any work; in other words, an exterior form of *hesychia*. Such an interpretation of *scholē* has no positive content and cannot assist us in the knowledge of God: “Divine knowledge cannot be achieved with an external stillness. What is conducive to this is *hesychia* that is perfected in a good and lawful struggle [with the passions]” (Συμεὼν Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15, 135-139 in Darrouzès 1967, p.454). Someone, who does not observe the commandments through an intense spiritual struggle, remains still in both

domains (worldly and spiritual) and this is most certainly a sin (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15, 103-106 in Darrouzès 1967, p.452). Divine knowledge does not come as a result of exterior stillness, even though exterior stillness may be useful for it. Nor is hesychasm confined to nor restrained by exterior stillness.

Orthodox hesychasm is a lived condition. It presupposes keeping the commandments and cultivating the virtues. When the one who struggles with his passions becomes experienced in *praxis* (i.e., when he has successfully struggled to reach the virtues “lawfully and well”), he is deemed worthy of remaining focused in *theoria*. The enjoyment of this divine vision is true hesychasm which is a mental and spiritual hesychasm. St Gregory the Theologian, presenting these two forms of ascetic life, writes the following: “Which one do you prefer *praxis* or *theoria*? Divine vision (*theoria*) is for those who are perfect, *praxis* is for most. Both are conducive to each other and assist each other. You just have to prefer the one that suits you more.” (Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, *Ἐπη ηθικά* 33; PG37, 928A). Both forms of ascetic life are termed good and should be sought after. Each is called to prefer the one that suits him more. *Praxis* is suited to the many and *theoria* to the few. St Gregory the Theologian preferred *theoria*, and was led to it not so much by his peculiar spiritual and mental character but by his irresistible divine love (*eros*) for the “good and the *hesychia*” that he felt within himself (Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, *Απολογητικός της εις Πόντον φυγής* 6; PG35, 413B). St Gregory’s good friend, St Basil the Great, seemed to have preferred *praxis*. He posited it as the foundation of the monastic habit.

In relation to St Basil’s views on *praxis* and *theoria*, some claim that he (St Basil) thought that being alone or in the desert was incompatible with the social nature of humans and that he (St Basil) allowed this kind of monasticism (being secluded and avoiding social contact) only for hermits and ascetic monks, as an exception to the rule. This interpretation of St Basil’s work is, I think, too simplistic. Appearances here deceive us. St Basil the Great lived, intensely, the *hesychia* of the hesychasts and highlighted its significance for a true spiritual life. His hesychastic life was the stable foundation upon which he based his unmatched pastoral and social work. Seen in this way, one can better understand St Basil’s fearless responses to the local ruler [*Eparch*] Modestos and his voluntary distribution of all the riches he inherited from his parents to the poor. According to St Basil the Great, if one has his mind fragmented and dispersed, “he cannot achieve love for God nor love for one’s neighbour” (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Ὅροι κατά πλάτος* 5, 1; PG31, 920B). It is also significant that he emphasises in his texts the biblical verse:

“Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart” (Δευτ. 15, 9). In an oration on this topic, he notes: “Beware and attend to yourself; attend not to things that belong to you nor to people who are related to you but attend to your own self” (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Ομιλία εις το «πρόσεχε σεαυτώ»* 2; PG31, 201A). *Hesychia* is not the result of *praxis*, but a presupposition of its correct application. *Praxis* properly conceived can only be the fruit of *hesychia*. The precise and correct observation of the double command of love (Love of God and Love of one’s neighbour; Mark 12:30-31) presupposes the unification of the fragmented man, the focus and concentration of the mind and the soul, and mental and spiritual *hesychia*. St Basil the Great did not prefer the isolation of hermitages, which could be easily established by transforming the semi-secluded communities within which the faithful of his time lived. He did not prefer them, because he had already exercised and matured within *hesychia*, achieving *theoptia* (vision of God), as is evidenced in his writings: “The mind that is elevated towards God can see great visions [of God] and see the divine beauty, only to the degree that divine grace has allowed him to see and his state of mind and soul can receive” (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Επιστολή Αμφιλοχίω Επισκόπω* 233, 1; PG32, 865D). Wishing to remove the danger of fragmentation and self-love, which is usually the result of a secluded isolationist life for the many, he strongly supported the monastic life within a commune (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Όροι κατά πλάτος* 7, 1-2; PG31, 929A-932A). But he also stipulated the pre-requisites of self-denial and the denial of worldly things as part of the promise a novice has to make to enter a monastic community; in this way, St Basil provided firm foundations for monastic communities and allowed hesychasm and divine grace to play their role. St Basil defined this denial as “transferring the human heart to the divine realm” (Μ. Βασιλείου, *Όροι κατά πλάτος* 7, 3; PG 31, 940C). This dimension of the monastic tradition, but also of the wider Christian life was further developed by his brother, St Gregory of Nyssa, in his wonderful spiritual and hesychastic writings.

Orthodox monasticism was from the beginning hesychastic. And the ancient monk, living away from the worldly affairs and practicing incessant prayer was, in essence, a Hesychast (Ιω. Μάγεντόφ 1965, στ. 83). It was necessary to find refuge in *hesychia* so that he “will talk to God without getting his mind and soul cloudy and cluttered” (Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, *Λόγος εις εαυτόν* 26, 7; PG35, 1237A). But this is essential for any real Christian believer. So, we can see that *hesychia* is a fundamental characteristic of the ecclesiastical mentality and perspective on things. It is Mary’s “good part, which will not be taken away from her” mentioned in Luke 10:42, which was named “good” by the Lord himself and it is mentioned and praised in all Orthodox tradition. In this way, we can

understand the familiarity and ease with which all the members of the Orthodox Church relate to what is described in the ascetic writings and what is preserved in the *Philokalia* and the texts of Sts Isaac the Syrian, Ephraim the Syrian, John of the Ladder, Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and many others.

Hesychia is (and should always be) a method in *ascesis* and a way of life for all Christians. As is seen in the field of ethics, so in the life of the faithful, it does not appear all at once or in portions, but unfolds dynamically with a continuous effort of self-denial and total dependence on the will of God; this is achieved primarily in monasticism and through obedience. As the monk goes through the process of cleansing himself from all his passions and the keeping of the commandments, he achieves, through obedience to his spiritual father, a clean mind and a clean heart. In this way, he lives *hesychia* as *hesychia* of the mind and the heart. He lives it as a union of the mind to the heart or in other words as a concentration into “the hidden man within the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4), where the clear reflection of God’s truth can become possible. Here *hesychia* is no longer ascetic, but it has become truly charismatic. It is a state of clarity in the soul, according to which man, free from all interior turmoil and messiness of this world, can transcend himself and surrender to the *theoria* of God. In this state of clarity, man becomes intentionally transparent to God and becomes known to God, because God wants him; he knows God because he is aligned to His will. For this reason, in the truly authentic charismatic life achieved through divine grace and *hesychia*, according to Elder Sophrony of Essex, “*ascesis* is no more” (Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου (Σαχάρωφ) 2010, p.212). In this state, the passions have been overcome and *ascesis*, thus, has no reason for existence.

In the circles of academic theology, there was once a strong debate on the biblical foundations of hesychasm: what is its purpose and on what divine command is it based, when all gospel commands can be summarised, as it is known, on the double command of love? This kind of questioning is of course essential, but these questions remain unanswerable if one remains within the realm of academic theology. Certainly, there is wide biblical support for *hesychia* and hesychasm in the verse of the psalms: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ψαλμ. 45, 11; KJV: Ps. 46: 10; see above for a theological analysis and interpretation of the passage). This verse is often given a strictly practical significance without taking into account any wider or deeper impact. This is the way (for example) that the Byzantine humanists understood the meaning of the verse and this is why St Symeon the New Theologian reacted in his work against this humanistic interpretation (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15,

135-138 in Darrouzès 1967, p.454). There are also, of course, many examples found in the Holy Bible, such as when Prophet Elijah went to Mt Choreb (III Kings 19:11-12) and St John the Baptist sought refuge in the desert, becoming the voice that cries in the wilderness (see John 1:23, where John uses a prophecy to describe him; see Isaiah 40:3), or even when Jesus Himself went to the *hesychia* of the desert to pray (Matt. 4:1 and 14:13; Mark 1:12-13 and 1:35; Luke 4:1 and 5:16). But, these are not considered capable of justifying hesychasm. There are many people, even today, who consider *hesychia* to be invalid in some way because it disregards action (*praxis*). They do not comprehend that without *hesychia* there can be no action: without *hesychia* there can be no *praxis*. Without *hesychia*, salvation appears as a *chimera*, because man will never truly be “saved” or whole even if he appears momentarily to have reached salvation (*σῶος*: etymologically the Greek word for salvation relates to wholeness); man without *hesychia* remains always fragmented and broken into pieces (despite appearances). In this way, Christian salvation ultimately depends on *hesychia*: without *hesychia*, man is not able to be saved in his entirety and wholeness.

Overall, within *cataphatic* or even *apophatic* academic theology, there is no essential justification for *hesychia* and *hesychasm*. The answer to the question of the necessity of *hesychia* for academic theology must be found in the form of *metatheology*, which is known only by and through ecclesiastical experience. Only there a relevant answer can be found because only there can one check and ascertain the essential relation of *hesychia* to the lived experience of Christianity, and, in particular, maintaining the double commandment of love. In this way, the ascetic experience of *hesychia* and *hesychasm* can be seen as a unique *metatheological* foundation of Christian theology.

If the first aim of theology is knowledge of God, i.e. *theognosia*, and if *theognosia* is the result of the loving communion of God and man, *hesychasm* (with *hesychia* as a practical tool but also as a fruit of *theognosia*), is *metatheologically* confirmed, i.e., it becomes one with the experiential and ontological originality of *theognosia*. The doctrine has a depth that cannot be measured nor calculated, as St John of the Ladder, the teacher of hesychasm, writes: The mind of the hesychast approaches doctrine with no peril; but going near it, without first removing the passions, is extremely dangerous (Ιω. Σινάιτου, *Κλίμαξ* 27, 9; PG88, 1097C).

St Gregory the Theologian also alluded to this danger in his writings:

“Only a few can philosophise properly about God.... Because this is suited only to those who have examined their life and have lived their life having an experience of God, and before this experience they have struggled to cleanse their soul and body, or at least they try to do so, living a life in balance. Because it is not possible for the unclean to touch the clean, and if this is attempted, it is not safe to do so” (Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου, Λόγος 27 (Θεολογικός 1) 7; PG36, 13D).

Theology presupposes cleanliness in the relation and communion with the embodied *Logos* of God. According to St John of the Ladder, if the senses have not been cleansed and have not united in God’s way of being sensed, “it is difficult to talk about God”. Whoever talks about God in such a state “uses his own concepts and erudition to speak about God” (Ιω. Σινάϊτου, Κλίμαξ 30, 12-13; PG88, 1157C). A presupposition for theology, but also the true authentic theological state, is living one’s life with *hesychia*, chastity, and purity: “chastity and purity make a student a true theologian” (Ιω. Σινάϊτου, Κλίμαξ, *ibid*). Theology, as a state of mind and soul, can only be lived within the *hesychia* of the mind; the *hesychia* of the heart.

The “spiritual man”, St Paul the Apostle writes, “judges all, but cannot be questioned by anyone” because he has turned his “mind towards Christ” (1 Cor. 2:15). *Hesychia* of the mind makes transparent the mind of the *ascetic* and allows for an affinity towards and *oikeiosis* with the mind of Christ. With this gift, which operates within the body of Christ, His Church, the ecclesiastically experienced theologian makes his own witness and testimony in a cataphatic way, using always limited human reason and language to provide to all the transcendental truth of the Spirit.

It is of note that St Symeon the New Theologian, in his oration entitled *On Hesychia*, restricts his discussion, almost exclusively, to cases of people who forget about the world and its cares and dedicate themselves to Christ and His gifts. In this way, he refers to the prostitute, who made Jesus’ feet wet with her tears dedicating herself only to the One, Who could forgive her sins. St Symeon the New Theologian also reminds us of the case of the three disciples who followed Jesus to Mt Thabor and lived the remarkable experience of His Transfiguration. He also reminds us of the apostles’ remarkable experience of seeing their resurrected teacher appearing in front of them while being locked inside “because of the fear of the Jews”, and so on. These examples, St Symeon the New Theologian notes, must not only be considered descriptions of Jesus’ life by the hesychast but he must also pursue them and try to live them within himself. If this does not take place and the hesychast disregards the commandments and stops working with his body, he loses any opportunity to attain knowledge of how to work within his heart and mind, he stays

still in both his physical and his mental/spiritual dimension and, in this way, he commits a serious sin. If someone knows well how to struggle and work spiritually, his bodily activity of keeping the commandments is not stopped by his spiritual endeavours but rather his physical work is further supported and enabled. If someone limits his efforts only to bodily *ascesis*, there will come the time that, if he stops in his *ascesis* or reduces his efforts slightly, he will also lose all progress gained spiritually as well (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 15, 94 κ.ε. in Darrouzès 1967, p.450 and later).

St Gregory Palamas makes an important distinction in his work between the intellectual knowledge of God and the experiential knowledge of God, using the terms *θεολογία* (*theologia*, i.e., theology) and *θεοπτία* (*theoptia* or vision of God). He places particular emphasis on the fact that for him there is a great distance and a significant difference between *theologia* (theology) and *theoptia*: in *theoptia* there is a more profound sense of knowledge that is achieved in a truly enlightened state; in *theologia* knowledge is circumstantial and lacking in certainty. He uses the analogy of knowing about the existence of one thing as distinct from actually having it in one's hands and measuring it with one's senses. It is one thing to talk about God, and another to enter into communion with Him: "it is not the same thing to talk about a characteristic of God and to meet and know God Himself". Theology needs language and the art of speaking; it needs to use logic and appropriate reasoning, arguments, and proofs when one is to communicate his knowledge to others. This can be done by people with the wisdom of this world, who may not have the purity of soul and mind. But, for St Gregory Palamas, to acquire within himself an experiential knowledge of God and commune with Him and reflect His most pure light to the degree that this is possible in human nature cannot be done if one is not clean and engaged with the virtues or if he does not come out of his self and his powers, i.e., if he does not transcend himself (Γρηγορίου Παλαμά, *Υπέρ των ιερώς ησυχάζόντων* 1, 3, 42; Chrestou 1962, p.453).

This ecstatic character of *theoptia* is aligned to the ecstatic character of Christian anthropology. Man does not gain his true value if he does not become something superior to what he is. Man was not created by God to remain in the state he was created. He was created as man by nature so that he can become God by grace. What is considered "likeness of God" is the ecstatic measure and norm, which was provided at the time of his creation in his very nature for his fulfilment as a person and the realisation of the purpose of his existence.

This possibility of the ecstatic transcendence of human nature lies within human nature. It was stated from the moment of its creation by referring to its iconic character. Human nature is iconic (created to be the icon of God). This does not mean that human nature is not real. It is real and dynamic. This is the nature of a person. By this, we mean that its true reality, its truth, lies in direct relation to its absolute archetype, which lies outside its relational character. The truth of human nature is transcendental. It is related to true Being of which it is an icon.

Man has both an infinite and a poor, restricted, value. He is of infinite value when he keeps himself clean and reflects within himself the true Being, God. God is infinite by nature; man, being an icon of God, gains infinity by His grace. But when a man is unclean, i.e., clouded by sin, and loses his value, he can only have a restricted and poor value. He then gradually becomes clouded and loses any sense of value, because he destroys within himself his archetype, the Absolute and the Infinite.

St Ignatius the God-bearer writes: “It is better to be silent and exist than keep talking without existing... The one who has in his possession truly the word of Jesus can also listen to his own *hesychia*, so that he can exist as perfect as possible, and be known as such [to God], both in terms of what he says and does and in terms of the things he does not speak about” (Ιγνατίου Αντιοχείας, *Προς Εφεσίους* 15, 2).

Hesychastic theology listens to the *hesychia* of God. It performs the work of Mary, who was near the feet of Christ and listened to his teaching (Luke 10:39). But there is also academic theology, which performs the work of her sister Martha who was preoccupied with the dinner preparations for Christ (Luke 10:40). Without Martha’s work, there would be no dinner. Martha loved Christ, and so did Mary. But Jesus praised the behaviour of Mary, emphasising “that good part which shall not be taken away from her” (Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου Σαχάρωφ 2013, p.182).

Academic theology has always been turned to the world and distracted by its tendency to serve the people (Luke 10:40). It affiliates itself to literature, history, philosophy, sociology, and anything else that it considers useful, such as science. It often works with a lot of worldly care for the preparation of the dinner of the Church, expressing sometimes, as Martha did, its resentment and exasperation about all those who behave like Mary in disregarding Jesus’ praise for her. Academic theology, while it performs the work of Martha, often wishes to appropriate the fruit of Mary’s work. It is for this reason that it often leads both the Church and the faithful astray.

The work of academic theology is useful and important when it restricts itself to serving the people and is carried out with a spirit of

humility. It researches and brings to the surface the life and tradition of the Church. But it becomes quite debatable and even dangerous when it is left to human pride and arbitrariness. It is of particular importance in not reducing the non-experiential theology to dangerous forms of idle talk. “Idle talk”, emphasises St Symeon the New Theologian, is not only “speaking without any benefit”, as a person may think, but also speaking about things that one has no personal experience about. For example, when someone teaches about the disregard of worldly praise, without himself disregarding it as harmful and without an experiential knowledge that it is an obstacle to acquiring “praise from above”, he not only talks idly, but he also lies about things he knows only superficially (Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Ηθικά* 1, 461-468; Darrouzès 1966, p.306).

Academic theology is founded on knowledge. And it is right when it is founded on the right knowledge. Experiential theology² is not founded on knowledge. It is founded on the light of God. Knowledge is not the light. But the light is true knowledge (“*Ἡ γνώσις οὐκ ἐστὶ τὸ φῶς, ἀλλὰ τὸ φῶς, ἡ γνώσις, ὑπάρχει*”, Συμεών Νέου Θεολόγου, *Κατηχήσεις* 28; Krivochéine, B., Paramelle, J., eds. 1965, σ. 146). Academic theology rests on solid foundations when it is founded on true knowledge of the light. This foundation enriches academic theology. Theologians who are versed in academic theology need to enrich their minds and theology with the theology of the light, which necessitates a form of communion with experiential theology: some form of *ascesis*, *kenosis* (emptying oneself from oneself) and obedience, so that it can bear fruit. Without this presupposition, theology becomes “idle talk” or even “false talk”. For St Diadochos of Photike “there is nothing poorer than a mind which even though not related to God is philosophising about God” (Διαδόχου Φωτικῆς, *Κεφάλαια γνωστικά* 7; εκδ. J. E. Weis-Liebersdorf, σ. 10). St Sophronios of Essex, noting the particular narrative of academic theology,

² Editor/Translator’s Note: “Experiential theology” here has nothing to do with what is known as *Experiential Theology* in the West, an idea put forward in its first form by the Protestant, Reformist, and Puritan, Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) in his *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (1700); in it, à Brakel claimed that the doctrines of the Bible should become a reality in the hearts and lives of believers by describing in detail what the experiential application of the doctrine should be and by describing what it is when believers struggle to live the message of the Bible; Mantzarides’ idea (influenced primarily by hesychastic and ecclesiastical writings of the Fathers) in some other translations has been termed “empirical” theology (again, not a very good translation, because it has nothing to do with the philosophical movement of Empiricism in the 18th century and later, influencing primarily Protestant Theology).

writes: “True theology is not the fruit of human intellect, nor the result of critical studies but the revelation of the mystery regarding the superior Being that man can approach with grace from the Holy Spirit” (Αρχιμ. Σωφρονίου (Σαχάρωφ) 2003, p.212). For this reason, the real understanding of Church dogma can only be achieved with a “non-dogmatic” approach, i.e., through personal experience of this dogma within the mysteries of the Church.

In academic theology, there are two common tendencies: the conservative and the progressive. The “conservative” theologians with their sterile indecisiveness “speak an empty talk”. They cannot move towards or are even blocked from reaching out to the “divine fire” of *hesychia*. The “progressive” theologians, with their daring imagination and bold meditations, always try to be in “creative” accord with worldly society. If one sees academic theology in this way, one can understand that there is no “conservation” nor “progress” in true theology. The “fire of *hesychia*” will always be the focal point of real “conservation” and real “progress” in true theology. This is theology that aspires to acquire the position of Mary and not the position of Martha. Only Orthodox hesychasm can keep this fire burning and this fire is kept alive only through Orthodox hesychasm. The Church can find a solution to its problems only by approaching and partaking of this fire, only through its experience; hesychasm becomes then the only authentic source of meaningful change in the Church.

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2. PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS IN THE *HOMILIES FOR MAJOR FEAST DAYS* AND THE *HAGIORITE TOMOS* OF ST GREGORY PALAMAS

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Abstract: St Gregory Palamas is well-known for his dogmatic work and his connection to hesychasm. In contrast, he is rarely considered from a biblical perspective, although his works abound in references to the Scripture. This study aims to fill this gap by drawing attention to the works of St Gregory from a biblical perspective. The investigation will focus on some of St Gregory's homilies for the major feast days and the Hagiorite Tomos. As will be shown, St Gregory's relation to the biblical texts is important for two reasons: first, because of the continuity with the patristic tradition of interpreting the Scripture; and second, because St Gregory articulates very clearly some of the main features of patristic exegesis. The study will focus on: (1) the permanent appeal to other texts of the Scripture in the process of interpreting biblical texts; (2) the normativity of the patristic exegesis of the Scripture; (3) the ecclesiastical framework of biblical interpretation; (4) spiritual experience as a norm for understanding biblical descriptions; (5) actualization as a practical result in the process of biblical exegesis.

Keywords: St Gregory Palamas, biblical exegesis, biblical hermeneutics, Scripture, homilies.

Introduction

This study aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on Orthodox biblical hermeneutics. Over the past 80 years, Orthodox biblical scholars have tried to outline an Orthodox biblical hermeneutics: a hermeneutics in which the patristic interpretation of the Scripture has a

special place, for the reason that, in contemporary Orthodox theology, the patristic interpretation of the Bible is considered normative for biblical exegesis. In 1936, in Athens, at the first meeting of the Orthodox theological faculties, Fr George Florovsky enunciated a principle emphasizing the necessity of returning to the theology of the Fathers of the Church. Following this call, Orthodox biblical scholars are now trying to recover patristic exegesis. This recovery is not only about rediscovering, translating, or citing the exegesis of the Fathers, but also, and more importantly, about regaining what has been called the *paterikon phronema* ‘the mind of the Fathers’; that is, how they read, understood, explained, and applied the words of the Holy Scripture. More than that, it is about how they related to the Scripture in the ecclesiastical context.

As a result, in the last few years a series of books and studies have appeared written by Orthodox scholars such as John Breck (1998, 2003), Theodor Stylianopoulos (1997), the great Stylianos Papadopoulos (2010), Vasile Mihoc (2013), Constantin Coman (1996, 2001, 2002), to mention just a few. Let me add to this list another recent work, which may be less well-known, but, in my opinion, is one of the best books on this topic. It was written as a Ph.D. thesis in Romanian by Hieromonk Agapie Corbu and entitled: *The Holy Scripture and its Interpretation in the Writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (2002).

This effort has not been solely confined to Orthodox scholars. The interest of Western scholars has also been piqued and this has led to a number of collections and books by Western authors. I mention here just a few: a two-volume work by Charles Kannengieser entitled *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis* (2004) and *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit* (1995) edited by Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey. Of course, there are a lot of other books and studies, which have appeared and continue to appear on this topic, the interest in recovering the patristic exegesis having led to some significant editorial and research projects. In this sense, I mention here only two of them: *Biblia Patristica* and *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* (Merkel 2012). It is very important to note that the scholastic way in which modern theology divides the history of the Church has negatively influenced research. I particularly have in mind the notion that the “patristic age” extends, at most, only to the eighth century after Christ. This upper boundary has nothing to do with the patristic and ecclesiastical way of understanding the spiritual guidance and the role of the Fathers (Florovsky 1972, 109-112; 1975, 16-22). Nonetheless, this has led to the quasi-universal exclusion of the period after the eighth century from studies on the reception of the Scripture. For example, the writings of the hesychastic movement are for the most part neglected.

In an attempt to remedy this, in this study, I will investigate the interpretation of the Bible by St Gregory Palamas, one of the greatest theologians of the Church. I start from a comment by Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, who thought that, in the context of modern theology, we cannot speak of anything serious and concrete about Orthodox theology without including the contribution of St Gregory Palamas (Stăniloae 1993, 5). Indeed, St Gregory's clarifications and distinctions are so important that any theology after him cannot ignore them. I am also inspired by the excellent study of Prof Christos Oikonomou (Oikonomou 2000). As such, although St Gregory did not write detailed commentaries, or leave us specific homilies on the books of the Scripture, his homilies for the great feasts and saints offer us a sufficient basis for understanding his way of interpreting the divine Scripture. In this study, I will try to outline some principles of St Gregory's biblical exegesis starting from his homilies on the major feasts. I will also discuss St Gregory's *Hagiorite Tomos*—although this is not a homily, it is one of the hesychastic works where St Gregory's principle of personal spiritual experience is most clearly articulated.

The permanent appeal to the Scripture as the basis of biblical interpretation

Concerning biblical interpretation, it is very interesting to observe that St Gregory Palamas (like other great patristic exegetes before him, such as John Chrysostom, Basil the Great and others), interprets the texts of the Scripture through constant reference to other texts within it. This manner of exegesis constitutes a peculiarity of the patristic interpretation of the Bible. It is very important to mention that the Fathers of the Church did not base their biblical exegesis on quoting the Fathers that came before them, but rather drew directly on the words of Scripture. Of course, they did appeal to the opinion of the Fathers before them, but mostly as an aid to interpreting a difficult text, the Scripture at all times being their first resource. In this sense, the majority of the homilies of St Gregory Palamas can be defined as exegetical homilies *par excellence* (Coreștiuc 2013). In his preaching, St Gregory extensively used biblical texts because, in patristic understanding and practice, the reception of the revelation is an active one and it is part of redefining humankind in Christ, which reveals Himself as divine Logos. As an example of this manner of doing exegesis, I will quote a small part from *Homily 24* (24, 9), which he wrote for the Pentecost:

In what sense is the Holy Spirit the promise of the Father? He foretold Him through His prophets, saying through Ezekiel, *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will put my spirit within you* (cf. Ezek 36:26-27). Through Joel He proclaims, *And it shall come to pass in the last days, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh* (cf. Joel 2:28). Longing for the Holy Spirit, Moses cried out in anticipation, *Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord Would put his spirit upon them* (Num 11:29). As the gracious will of the Father and His promise are one and the same as the Son's, Christ told those Who believed in Him, *Whosoever drinketh of water that I shall give him, it shall be to him a well of water springing up into everlasting life* (John 4:14), and *He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water* (John 7:38). By way of explanation, the Evangelist says, *Thus spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe in him should receive* (John 7:39). As He approached His saving Passion He told His disciples, *If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth* (John 14:15-17). And again, *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things* (John 14:25-26). And yet again, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from Father, he shall testify of me* (John 15:26), and *he will guide you into all truth* (John 16:13). (Homily 24: *On how the Holy Spirit was manifested and shared out at Pentecost. Also about Repentance*, pp.28-29).

Ἀλλὰ πῶς ἐπαγγελία τοῦ Πατρὸς τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον; Ἐπειδὴ διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ προφητῶν προεπηγγέλματο τοῦτο, διὰ μὲν τοῦ Ἰεζεκιὴλ λέγων, «δώσω ἡμῖν καρδίαν καινὴν καὶ Πνεῦμα καινόν, καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα μου δώσω ἐν ὑμῖν», διὰ δὲ τοῦ Ἰωήλ, «καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἔσχαταις «μέραις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα». Τοῦτο καὶ ὁ Μωϋσῆς ἐπιποθῶν, προανεφώνησε λέγων, «τις δώσει πάντα τὸν λαὸν Κυρίου προφήτας, ὅταν δῶ Κύριος τὸ Πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐπ' αὐτούς;». Ἐπεὶ δὲ μία ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδοκία καὶ ἡ ἐπαγγελία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ, διὰ τοῦτο τοῖς εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύουσιν εἰπὼν, «ὁ πῶν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, ὃ ἐγὼ δώσω αὐτῷ, γενήσεται πηγὴ ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον», καὶ, «ὁ πιστεύων ἐμέ, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ Γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ρεύσουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος»· ὁ ἐρμηνεύων ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς, «τοῦτο δε», φησὶν, «ἔλεγε περὶ τοῦ Πνεύματος ὃ ἐμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύοντες εἰς αὐτόν». Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ σωτήριον ἐρχόμενος πάθος πρὸς τοὺς οικείους μαθητάς ἔλεγεν, «ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷτε με τὰς ἐντολάς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσατε· καὶ ἐγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ ἄλλον Παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν, ἵνα μένη μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας»· καὶ πάλιν, «αὐτὰ λελάληκα ὑμῖν, παρ' ὑμῖν μένων· ὁ δὲ Παράκλητος, τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ Πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὄνοματί μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα»· καὶ πάλιν, «ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ Παράκλητος, ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ καὶ ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν». (Ὅμιλία 24, 9 εἰς τὴν Κυριακὴν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, pp.110-112).

Although at first glance, this may look like what has been called in the West *Scriptura Scripturae Interpres*, I argue that it is not. First, we can observe that this way of interpreting the Bible has strong roots in the synagogue *modus* of interpreting texts and from here, in the way in which Jesus himself explained the Old Testament. A classic example one can find in the Gospels is the text of Luke 4:16, where Jesus reads and interprets a certain fragment from Prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Capernaum. This form of discourse on the biblical text is the basis for what later was called “homilies”. From the early Church through to late patristic exegesis, one can find this “style” of biblical interpretation. As such, we can say that this is a specific Judeo-Christian *modus* of biblical interpretation, which can be observed diachronically as seeing a certain influence of the synagogue preaching style on the Christian sermon. In a very practical way, this connection is visible also in the fact that, in the homilies of St Gregory Palamas, the Old Testament texts are used to such a degree that they cannot be neglected. Second, the Scripture is explained with the help of other passages of the divine text, which develop the same teaching or complete the understanding about the same reality or situation. However, this does not mean that the Scripture can explain itself, but rather that the interpreters have appropriated the text, which becomes their life, in keeping with the Pauline exhortation: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (*Col 3:16 KJV*). Or: “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (*Eph 5:19 KJV*). The Fathers of the Church turned the words of the Scripture into a vehicle, which they used to speak about spiritual life. This is what one can find in the Divine Liturgy too. All the texts, even the prayers which the priests have to say in a lower voice, are full of biblical expressions. In the same way, the Fathers use inspired verses, words, and expressions from the whole of the Scripture for interpreting one specific biblical verse or passage. The thinking behind this approach is that the inspired Scripture can be interpreted best only by a person, who is living with the same Holy Spirit that inspired the divine text, and the best way to express this interpretation is with the words of divine Scripture.

This explains why St Gregory often cites half-verses only. Indeed, his references to the Bible are not citations of the Bible, but they are biblical phrases used to express his own interpretation:

What will be the outcome of this life of constraint and the reward for these struggles? That ye may be, it says, children of your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:45), heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17); that you may have immortal life and receive an ineffable, unshakable, unending kingdom, living and reigning with God for endless ages (Homily 22: On the same Feast [sc. The Ascension] Referring also to Passions and Virtues, pp.7-8).

Τί δὲ τὸ τοῦ βιαίου τούτου βίου τέλος καὶ τῶν ἀγόνων τὸ ἔπαθλον; «Ὅπως γένησθε», φησὶν, «υἱοὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς», καὶ κληρονόμοι μὲν Θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ζωὴν ἀθάνατον σχοίητε καὶ βασιλείαν ἄρρητον, ἀσάλευτον, ἀδιάλειπτον, ἀδιάδοχον παραλάβητε, εἰς αἰῶνας ἀπείρους τῷ Θεῷ συζῶντες καὶ συμβασιλεύοντες (Ὁμιλία 22, 11 εἰς τὴν Ἀνάληψιν Δευτέρα, pp.60).

As we can see, like all the Church Fathers, Palamas had a strong grounding in the Bible and he understood and related to the Scripture not as a book, no matter how important, but rather as to the living Word of God and a testimony about God and life in God, to lead, inspire, and fulfil a Christian life.

Patristic biblical exegesis is the norm for interpreting Scripture

Even if St Gregory did not quote very often from the Fathers of the Church in his interpretation of the Bible, the appeal to the Fathers is clearly very important to him. He has a strong ecclesiastical consciousness and that is why he relates to the Fathers before him as to other members of the Church who had spiritual experiences similar to those described by the Scripture. In this sense, St Gregory underlines the importance of relating to the ancestors and their spiritual expertise. St Gregory feels that the Christian life is a *modus vivendi* inherited from one's ancestors and not an autonomous *modus* of life. Going further, the Scripture should not be seen as a mere manual with rules that should be followed, but the Words of God; thus, by and through interpreting them, one can understand the biblical way of life, the biblical relation to God, to others, and to the whole of creation. This way of life¹ was experienced by the Fathers and only through this experience can the Scripture be interpreted in a sufficiently deep manner. Therefore, the interpretations of the Fathers are very

¹ This is a reality that has appeared from the Book of Acts onwards, where we find Christianity being called “the road” and “the way” (ἡ ὁδός, -οῦ) many times (9:2; 13:10; 16:17 etc.).

important and St Gregory expresses this repeatedly in his writings. For example, in the Homily 34 for the Feast of Transfiguration, he warns believers to run away from those who reject the interpretation of the Church Fathers:

Let us flee from those who reject Patristic interpretations and attempt by themselves to deduce the complete opposite, while pretending to concern themselves with the literal sense of a passage, they reject its godly meaning. We should run away from them more than we would from a snake, for when a snake bites it kills the body temporarily, separating it from the immortal soul, but when these evil men get their teeth into a soul they separate it from God, which is eternal death for the soul. Let us escape as far as we can from such people, and take refuge with those who teach piety and salvation in accordance with the traditions of the Fathers (Homily on the Transfiguration, 34, 2, p.134).

Φύγωμεν οὖν τοὺς τὰς πατρικὰς ἐξηγήσεις μὴ παραδεχομένους, ἀλλὰ παρ' ἐαυτῶν πειρωμένους εἰσάγειν τὰ ἐναντία, καὶ τὰς μὲν ἐν τῷ γράμματι λέξεις περιέπειν ὑποκρινομένους, τὴν δὲ εὐσεβῆ διάνοιαν ἀπωθουμένους· καὶ φύγωμεν μᾶλλον ἢ φεύγει τις ἀπὸ ὄφεως. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐνδοκῶν τὸ σῶμα θανατοῖ πρόσκαιρα, τῆς ἀθανάτου ψυχῆς χωρῖσας· οἱ δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς λαβόμενοι τοῖς ὁδοῦσι χωρίζουσιν αὐτὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅπερ ἐστὶ θάνατος αἰώνιος τῆς ἀθανάτου ψυχῆς. Φεύγωμεν οὖν τοὺς τοιοῦτος πάσῃ δυνάμει, καὶ προσφεύγωμεν τοῖς ὑποτιθεμένοις τὰ εὐσεβῆ καὶ σωτήρια, ὡς συνάδοντα ταῖς πατρικαῖς παραδόσεσι (Ὁμιλία 34, 2 εἰς τὴν Σεπτὴν Μεταμορφωσιν, pp.356-358).

This quote very clearly expresses St Gregory's understanding of the importance and value of the patristic tradition in biblical interpretation. St Gregory's regard for the Fathers is not confined to this passage only; in the immediately preceding context he also says that the divine words of the Holy Gospel come to us through a grace that is so lofty that only the God-bearing Fathers can guide us to it (see *ibid* 34, 1).

The text quoted above also highlights St Gregory's understanding of the protective function of patristic exegesis. One who takes into account the interpretations of the Fathers can be protected from the great danger of heresy. And this is not just because the Fathers are diachronically closer to biblical events or because they have received and left us a huge heritage, but rather because they had the same experience as the human authors of the Scripture.

The ecclesiastical framework of biblical interpretation

The Church Fathers were members of the Church of their time, and it is in this capacity that they read and explained the Bible. The

majority of patristic exegesis was written by authors who were not ordinary members of the Church, but rather monks, deacons, priests, and bishops; in other words, people with a certain degree of responsibility within the ecclesiastic community. Hence, they practiced an exegesis from within the Church directed towards fellow members of the Church (Vild 2015, 152-154). This situation held for St Gregory too. As we can understand from the style and the tone of his homilies, they were prepared for the spiritual edification of the members of the Church of his time. More than that, in his thought there are three aspects of the Church that are interdependent: Divine Grace, the Gospel, and the Bishop (*Hierarchy*):

Each hierarch in his turn comes to give the city this grace and gift of God and the enlightenment of divine Spirit through the Gospel. Those who reject any of them, as can happen, interrupt God's grace, break the divine succession, separate themselves from God and deliver themselves up to sinful rebellions and all kinds of disasters, as you are obviously aware from recent experience
(Homily on Pentecost, 24, 11, p.29).

Ταύτην οὖν τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν δωρεάν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸν διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου φωτισμὸν τοῦ θείου Πνεύματος ἔρχεται κομίσων τῇ πόλει τῶν κατὰ καιροῦς ἀρχιερέων ἕκαστος. Οἱ δὲ τινὰ τούτων ἀπωθοῦμενοι, τὸ εἰς αὐτοὺς ἦκον, διακόπτουσι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν χάριν καὶ διασπῶσι τὴν θείαν διαδοχὴν καὶ διίστῶσιν ἑαυτοὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ στάσεσιν ἀλιτηριώδεσι καὶ συμφοραῖς παντοδαπαῖς παραδίδονται· ὁ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐπέγνωτε πρὸ μικροῦ πάντως διὰ τῆς πείρας.
(Ὁμιλία 24, 11, εἰς τὴν Κυριακὴν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, p.112)

These three elements are: (1) the Holy Ghost, which extends the incarnated and resurrected body of Christ to believers; (2) the Gospel, which is the teaching and the power of God incarnated in words; and (3) the hierarchy, through which the sacraments are given to believers and the Gospel is preached. These are the main characteristics of the Church: in this equation, the Scripture (represented here by the name “Gospel”) and they cannot be separated from the Church. This understanding is very clear in the context of St Gregory’s controversy with Varlaam of Calabria and those who joined him. The hermeneutics of these opponents of St Gregory refused the idea of direct revelation of God through uncreated divine energy (Coresciuc 2013, 229). Put differently, the entire theology of St Gregory is based on the premise of the possibility of direct experience of God through His uncreated energies in the Church. That’s why his biblical hermeneutics is pastoral and focuses on spiritual reality, which every member of the Church is called to experience within his life in the Church.

Another example can be found in Homily 20, where St Gregory speaks about the Resurrection of Christ and about the cave that was the tomb for the body of Christ. This underlines the fact that the Church is the real cave where the Body of Christ is always present in the altar, and only those who stay in this “cave” to the end and gather and open their minds to divinity can deepen their understanding of the words of the Scripture and see God Himself with the eyes of the mind and also with the eyes of the flesh (Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά, *Ὁμιλία 20*, 13, 590). In other words, St Gregory is in continuity with the entire patristic tradition according to which a Christian life is a life “in Christ” (as already defined by St Paul: 1 Thess 4:16; Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 1:2; Ephesians 1:1 etc.), and the authentic biblical interpretation, which can only take place within the ecclesiastical framework.

Experience as one of the criteria of biblical exegesis

According to a principle that St Gregory developed in the *Hagiorite Tomos*, those who have not had experience of the Holy Ghost have to appeal to those who have, and these are the Fathers of the Church:

These are persons who have been initiated by actual experience who have renounced possessions, human glory and the ugly pleasures of the body for the sake of the evangelical life; and not only this. But they have also: strengthened their renunciation by submitting themselves to those who have attained spiritual maturity in Christ

(*Prologue of Hagiorite Tomos*).

[...] Οἱ μὲν αὐτῇ τῇ πείρᾳ μεμνημένοι, ὅσοι τῇ τε τῶν χρημάτων κτήσει καὶ τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων δόξῃ καὶ ταῖς τῶν σωμάτων οὐ καλαῖς ἡδοναῖς διὰ τὴν εὐαγγελικὴν ἀπετάξαντο ζωὴν, οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀποταγὴν ταύτην διὰ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τῇ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἡλικία προήκοντας ἐβεβαίωσαν ὑποταγῆς [...]

(Αγ. Τομος, Προλογος, p.498).

This emphasis on experience as a criterion for the spiritual life, which includes the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, also appears at the end of the *Hagiorite Tomos*:

These things we have been taught by Scriptures and have received from our fathers; and we have come to know them from our small experience (*Hagiorite Tomos 7*).

Ταῦτα ὑπὸ τῶν Γραφῶν ἐδιδάχθημεν, ταῦτα παρὰ τῶν ἡμετέρων πατέρων παρελάβομεν, ταῦτα διὰ τῆς μικρᾶς ἐγνώκαμεν πείρας [...]

(Αγ. Τομος 7, p.510).

We can see in Palamas' works the view that one can understand the deep meaning of the Scripture and the teaching of the Church Fathers only through the experience of God, which presupposes the ascetic life and what the Fathers called *apatheia*. Here we see a crucial element of the exegesis of St Gregory Palamas. One can find many references in his work that true theology is not about words, but about things; not about thoughts and syllogisms, but about life and deeds (Coresciuc 2013, 208). Applying this principle to the biblical texts, one can observe that St Gregory Palamas assumes that historical experience is important for biblical interpretation: the New Testament is based on the historical acts of the Incarnated Son of God. At the same time, the biblical interpretation of St Gregory goes beyond literary and historical analysis. He continues a branch of the patristic tradition of biblical exegesis—a branch that is part of the hesychastic approach to spiritual life and has been manifested in the ascetic writings of the Church. In this tradition, biblical hermeneutics is based on the tradition of *theophany*. His biblical interpretation comes from the direct experience of the reality described by the biblical texts. As some authors have previously commented (Coresciuc 2013, 211; Oikonomou 2000, 600), from the point of view of modern biblical scholarship (in which the historical-critical method is still the foundation for biblical hermeneutics), it is possible that St Gregory Palamas cannot be considered an interpreter of the Bible. In modern scholarship, he is more closely associated with *dogmatics* because of his distinction between the essence of and the energies in God; or with *hesychasm* because of his theology of the divine light. However, as Professor Oikonomou has suggested, St Gregory is very important as an *exegete* (interpreter) too, demonstrating throughout his work (not only in his 63 homilies for the Christian feasts, but in all of his works) an interpretation of the Scripture in which spiritual experience plays a central role (Oikonomou 2000, 600). In other words, St Gregory uses certain hermeneutics, which are those of the living experience of the same spiritual reality described in the Scripture. In this sense, the interpretation of the biblical texts is not only a form of spiritual meditation on the sacred texts and an attempt to extract some teachings that other generations of Christians can follow for spiritual development, but also a way to allow oneself to be guided by the words of the Scripture and to attain an understanding of the deep meaning of the biblical descriptions through living out the same spiritual reality. This is possible not only through reading and meditation, but also through prayer, through the shunning of the passions, through divine grace, and through living the mysteries and the life of the Church. As St Gregory says in Homily 47, true knowledge is that which is proved by deeds (Γρηγορίου του Παλαμά

1986, 113).

As a conclusion to this, we can say that in the view of St Gregory Palamas, one can tackle the Scripture only through a conceptual and ascetic effort (Coresciuc 2013, p.251). The exegesis of the biblical texts is an intellectual effort and, at the same time, it is a spiritual-ascetic endeavour with the purpose of purification. Both of these aspects are important factors in the act of exegesis.

The pastoral purpose of Palamas' biblical interpretation: actualisation

The Fathers did not interpret the Scripture for scholarly or academic purposes. Rather, they interpreted them for the benefit of believers who are trying to lead a Christian life within the Church. Their hermeneutics is not a double one—one for the specialist and another for the layman. This is proven by the fact that a large part of patristic exegesis consists of homilies, that is, sermons held within a church and for a church congregation. The superficial manner in which the Fathers sometimes approached certain biblical texts, while focusing much more on others, highlights the pastoral purpose of their exegesis. The Fathers aimed to interpret the biblical texts that were most relevant to the spiritual needs of their audience. Moreover, due to this ecclesiastic nature, the aim of exegesis in patristic thought is not restricted to *intentio auctoris*, *intention operis*, or *intention in receptoribus*.

In patristic thought, the ultimate goal of biblical exegesis is to achieve a resemblance with God. This may be attained by “the acquisition of virtue” (see St Gregory of Nyssa, *Explanation of the Titles of the Psalms*). That is why in most of St Gregory Palamas' homilies, in the second part we find a moral section, which presents a challenge to the recipient to change one's mind and life, to follow Christ and to enjoy what he offers us.

For example, at the end of Homily 24 on Pentecost, he notes:

But let us, brethren, I beseech you, abstain from deeds and words hateful to God, that we may boldly call God our Father. Let us truly return to Him, that He too may turn back to us, cleanse us from all sin and make us worthy of His divine grace. Than shall we keep festival both now and forever, and celebrate in a godly and spiritual

Ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς ἀποστῶμεν, ἀδελφοί, παρακαλῶ τῶν τῷ Θεῷ μεμισημένων ἔργων τε καὶ λόγων, ἵνα μετὰ παρρησίας ἐπικαλῶμεθα Πατέρα τὸν Θεόν. Ἐπιστρέψωμεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, ἵνα καὶ οὗτος ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ καθαρίσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἀξίους ποιήσῃ τῆς αὐτοῦ θείας χάριτος. Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας

way the accomplishments of God's promise, the Coming of the All-holy Spirit among men and His resting upon them; the fulfilment and perfection of the blessed hope in Christ Himself Our Lord
(Homily for Pentecost 24, 17, pp.34-35)

ἐορτάσομεν καὶ πανηγυρίσομεν ἐνθέως καὶ πνευματικῶς τὴν τῆς θείας ἐπαγγελίας τελείωσιν· τὴν τοῦ παναγίου Πνεύματος εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἔλευσιν καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν· τὴν τῆς μακαρίας ἐλπίδος ἔκβασιν καὶ συμπλήρωσιν ἐν αὐτῷ Χριστῷ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν
(Ὁμιλία 24, 17 εἰς τὴν Κυριακὴν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, pp.120-122)

This is the reason why the biblical texts are read and explained not as old historical records about what happened a long time ago, but as being very important for our lives here and now. In interpreting the biblical texts for a certain feast, St Gregory teaches us something concrete for our spiritual edification through the text and the event that is described.

For example, in the Homily for Pentecost, he considers that the event is present now, in celebration:

Truly the Saviour confirmed the Gospel teaching by His deeds and miracles, and fulfilled it through His Sufferings. He proved how beneficial it was for salvation by His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into heaven, and now by the descent of the divine Spirit upon His disciples, the event we celebrate today.
(Homily to the Pentecost, 24, 3, p. 24)

Τὴν γὰρ εὐαγγελικὴν διδασκαλίαν ἐπιστώσατο μὲν ὁ Σωτὴρ δι' οἰκείων ἔργων τε καὶ θαυμάτων, ἐτελείωσε δὲ διὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ παθημάτων· παρέστησε δὲ αὐτῆς τὸ μεγαλοφελὲς καὶ σωτήριον διὰ τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστάσεως, διὰ τῆς εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀναλήψεως, διὰ τῆς ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους μαθητὰς νῦν τελεσθείσης τοῦ θείου Πνεύματος ἐπελεύσεως ἣν ἐορτάζομεν σήμερον
(Ὁμιλία 24, 3 εἰς τὴν Κυριακὴν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, pp.100).

In this sense, the celebration and the texts of the Scripture, which are proclaimed in the Church, have to do not only with *anamnesis*, but also with the actualization of the texts. Their ultimate purpose is the edification of the spiritual life in order to reach God.

Conclusions

Reading St Gregory's homilies for the major feasts, one can discover that their author uses a certain type of hermeneutics when explaining biblical passages. This hermeneutics belongs to the patristic

way of relating to the Scripture.

The Scripture and the tradition of its interpretation represented by the exegesis of the Fathers are very important to St Gregory. Because patristic exegesis cannot be reproduced and repeated in a mechanical way, St Gregory does not quote from the various patristic authors; rather, he enters into what was termed “*paterikon phronema*”, the “mind of the Fathers” and, like the Fathers before him, he cites the biblical texts themselves as a means of explaining other biblical texts. This has two explanations. First, the Scripture is very important for the Fathers; the reading of the sacred texts and meditation on the biblical words have a special place in their spirituality. The reality of the Incarnation and the revelation that was captured in the Scripture represents the premise of the exegetic process. Secondly, the Scripture is not simply a historical record that is accessed by the Fathers, but the living Word of God.

The exegesis that St Gregory produced in his homilies is dedicated to the ecclesiastical community. Practically, the Scriptures were written and transmitted in the Church, by the Church, and for the needs of the members of the Church. The Scriptures are linked together by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which inspires the human authors of the biblical texts and also its interpreters—the greatest of them being those people with certain responsibilities in the Christian communities. The Scripture cannot be understood and explained outside of the Church, which is where the grace of the Holy Spirit works in many ways. This ecclesiastical approach is very obvious in St Gregory’s biblical exegesis.

Belonging to the hesychastic tradition, the biblical interpretation of St Gregory is very much targeted at the needs of those who are involved seriously and deeply in a spiritual life. The personal spiritual experience is an important element of spiritual life. In the *Hagioritic Tomos*, St. Gregory places it next to the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Explaining the biblical texts, St Gregory appeals to this experience and argues that outside of it, the Scripture cannot be understood. Only the experience of the spiritual life makes one able to attain a deep understanding of the words of the Scripture. For this reason, his exegesis is based on experience and is filled with exhortations for its recipients to seek out this experience, that is, to strive to live a biblical spiritual experience. In the process of biblical interpretation, St Gregory settles an important principle: those who have no experience must appeal to those who do (the Fathers). In light of this, the necessity for and role of the patristic tradition of biblical interpretation is very clearly shown.

As we have already seen, the exegesis of St Gregory has a marked pastoral and practical dimension. That is why in the final part of

his homilies, he expresses a very strong call to the audience to seek the spiritual experiences described in the biblical text. This can be associated with what is called in modern hermeneutics “the actualization of the biblical texts”.

This study opens some windows into St Gregory’s way of approaching the biblical texts. The sheer number of St Gregory’s homilies (63), but also the special way in which he appeals to and explains the biblical texts are both reasons for further research. Topics that have been left out of our discussion here, but would be interesting to investigate further, include the anagogical interpretation of the Scripture, the role of repentance and prayer in the process of exegesis, and orthodoxy and heresy in biblical exegesis, among others.

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3. THE LEGACY OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS' THEOLOGY AND HESYCHASM IN ROMANIAN ORTHODOXY

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Abstract: The context of this study is the *hesychastic* tradition and its influence on Romanian Orthodoxy. The activity of Saint Basil of Poiana Marului (1692-1767), and his disciple Saint Paisius of Neamt (Velichkovsky) (1722-1794), is seen in terms of a cross-cultural trajectory of the Greek-Romanian-Russian *philokalic* revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Doing so offers a more complex picture than the one generally known; one that had at its forefront a flourishing of monastic life and cultural activity in the Romanian provinces. I present here the remarkable contribution of the late Romanian theologian Father Dumitru Stăniloae (1900-1993), whose explorations of Saint Gregory Palamas' theology and spirituality played a major role in the neo-patristic and neo-*philokalic* revival of the twentieth century. Another aim of this study is to open up the reception of Saint Gregory Palamas' theology (and of *hesychasm*) in Romanian Orthodoxy to a wider audience by presenting the works of those scholars whose main studies on the subject have not yet been made widely available in English. Apart from Dumitru Stăniloae, I will also investigate the significant contributions made by Antonie Plamadeala, Ioan I. Ica Jr. and Ignatie Trif. Finally, towards the end, I will envisage the mission of *hesychasm* in an ecumenical perspective.

Keywords: Paisius of Neamt, Philokalia, philokalic tradition, hesychasm.

The Romanian legacy of *hesychasm*: Its beginnings in Wallachia and Moldavia

The *hesychast* tradition is attested in the Romanian provinces at least from the fourteenth century on. Hence, the Romanian Orthodox Church has a panoply of *hesychast* saints dating from the period between

the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries. These saints were spiritual fathers to the people, and healers and advisers to princes (Joanta 1992, p.18).

In the fourteenth century, Saint Nicodemus of Tismana came to Romania from Mount Athos and reorganized monasticism, founding cenobitic monasteries in the provinces. He, and his disciples, had been active promoters of *hesychast* spirituality. The influence of *hesychasm* also came via the first hierarchs of Wallachia, sent or supported by the *hesychast* Patriarchs of Constantinople: Kallistos I (d. 1363) and Philotheus I Kokkinos (c.1300-1379).

According to Marcus Bandinus, a Roman Catholic bishop who visited Moldavia in 1649, there was a vast number of *hesychasts* roaming the mountains and forests (Staniloae 2002a, p.532). The Jesus Prayer was practised in small *sketes*, which had a maximum of twelve inhabitants, as well as by solitary monastics, mostly monks but also some nuns (such as the famous Saint Theodora of Sihla, 17th c.). Up to today, many toponyms, names of monastic settlements, villages and other places, are associated with the word *hesychast* (*sihastru* in Romanian) and with the names of the *hesychasts* who lived in those places.

Prince Neagoe Basarab, now a saint in the Romanian synaxarion, was a true *hesychast* ruler of sixteenth century Wallachia, as attested in his monumental work *The Teachings of Ruling Prince Neagoe Basarab to his Son Teodosie*. The prince's role, according to this work, was to ensure a godly governance of the people of God—an idea taken from the Byzantines and achieved by practicing the Christian virtues and a life of prayer.

The *hesychasts* themselves fulfilled a specific ministry, playing an active 'political' role in the preservation of the Orthodox Faith and the unity and identity of the Romanians (e.g., Saint Daniil the *hesychast*, the confessor and 'political adviser' of Saint Stephen the Great, Prince of Moldavia from 1457 to 1504, who, as tradition has it, withstood the later Turkish invasions on the *hesychast's* advice).

There was a constant flow of monks visiting Mount Athos and the Romanian provinces, with Jerusalem and Sinai also being places that attracted Romanians (some Romanians were recorded among Saint Gregory of Sinai's disciples; see Simedrea 1972, p.675). These prominent spiritual destinations were always considered by the Romanians to be at the climax of Orthodox spiritual life, and most of the great Romanian Fathers had passed, at some stage in their lives, through the Athonite spiritual school (e.g., Basil of Poiana Marului, Paisius of Neamt, Gheorghe of Cernica; see Plamadeala 2004, p.365). Some of those who travelled

abroad could not adapt to *cenobitic* Athonite monasticism and were granted the right to organise small hermitages; in other cases, they returned home and contributed to the life of Romanian monasticism.

The hesychasts of the 18th century: Saint Basil of Poiana Marului and Saint Paisius of Neamt

During the eighteenth century, the Romanian provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia enjoyed relative political stability and experienced a cultural flourishing and, at the same, a thriving monastic life, to which Saint Basil of Poiana Marului and Saint Paisius of Neamt added their own contributions. It was due to this development in Romanian monasticism that the grand Russian monastic revival of the nineteenth century took place. The work of saints Basil and Paisius thus provided a middle ground, being the link between Athos and Russia.

Much is known and has been written about Saint Paisius Velichkovsky (also known as Saint Paisius of Neamt, which was the Moldavian monastery where he lived and completed most of his work). He was influenced by Saint Basil of Poiana Marului (1692-1767), a noteworthy *hesychast* of Ukrainian or Russian origin, who came to live in a Moldavian *skete* about 1724. He settled in Moldavia, first at Dalhauti and then at Poiana Marului where he stayed until his death in 1767. In 2003, because of his life of holiness and his unblemished Orthodox teaching, the Romanian Orthodox Church officially proclaimed Staretz Basil a saint. During his activity, a confederation of *sketes* was formed around him, named, in his time, ‘the second Athos’. Saint Basil was instrumental in Saint Paisius’ grand work. From 1743 to 1746 he accepted and guided Paisius in his Moldavian *skete*, as a *rasophor* (i.e., a novice before taking the monastic vows) and he tonsured Paisius as a monk while visiting Mount Athos in 1750. Referring to Saint Basil’s writings, Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov advises that anyone who wishes to practise in their time, with success, the Jesus Prayer must first study Saint Basil’s writings (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.21). These studies were named Preambles (introductions or forewords), and they prepared the way for the study of the Greek Fathers and the practice of *hesychia*. Saint Theophan the Recluse also recommends Saint Basil’s writings as explaining the place of physical techniques in the Jesus Prayer and aiding the beginner’s understanding of more complex writings, such as those of Kallistos, Ignatius Xanthopoulos, Gregory of Sinai and Nikiphoros the Solitary (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.21). The first edition of Saint Basil’s writings, together with Saint Paisius’ life,

initially published at Neamt in 1836, appeared posthumously in Russia, at Optina, in 1847.

The key characteristic of Saint Basil's writings, described by the Romanian theologian Ioan Ica Jr. as practical *hesychasm*, is that they are not only for the advanced, but for all Christians, and to be followed according to each one's measure. We thus have in his writings a practical and prudent alphabet of *hesychasm* (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.48). Ica believes that Saint Basil may have sensed a contemporary avoidance of the Jesus Prayer, down not to dismissal, but rather to a dubious reverence, as in the case of infrequently taking Holy Communion (Ica Jr. 2009, p.48). According to Saint Basil, without this prayer the Christian is openly exposed to the attacks of demons and the ravaging effect of the passions (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.49). The use of the Prayer of the Heart, Saint Basil says, is a 'fiery sword' in the fight of the mind against intrusive thoughts: a fight for repentance and humility (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.46). As Ica observes, this approach was in the spirit of the Egyptian and Sinaitic ascetics, rather than in that of the more sophisticated later Athonite-Byzantine Fathers who stressed psycho-physical methods that concentrated on breathing techniques and the location of the heart. In short, Saint Basil provided a combative, rather than a contemplative approach (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.46). He provides the necessary, preparatory steps towards dispassion, before engaging in practicing pure prayer, which is only recommended for the most advanced (Ica Jr. 2009a, pp.46-7). Hence, Saint Basil simplifies the Jesus Prayer by going back to basics, following the earlier tradition while still considering later developments. In Ica's view, the difference between him and Saint Paisius is a difference of emphasis due to St Paisius' desire to defend late Byzantine tradition and methods from attacks and misunderstandings (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.47).

Saint Paisius' contribution to Romanian monasticism

The flourishing of Moldavian monasteries attracted Russian and Ukrainian monks before the arrival of Saint Paisius. It was not the introduction of the Jesus Prayer as such, which determined the success of Saint Paisius' work, because this was already being practised by a significant number of hermits in the Romanian mountains; rather it was its introduction to the cenobitic life.

Most modern studies have overlooked the Romanian contribution to the eighteenth century *hesychast* revival, partly due to Saint Paisius' origins, but also due to limited knowledge of the context and the role played by the Romanian cultural and spiritual activity of the time.

According to Fr Staniloae, Saint Paisius' spirituality was enriched by the way Romanians welded *hesychast* practice with social-philanthropic activity (Staniloae 2002a, pp.555-87; cf. Candea 1997, pp.19-20.). Fr Staniloae has argued that the Paisian revival, with its almost exclusive stress on prayer, was subsequently re-modelled to suit the more practical spirit of Romanian monasticism, a thesis taken further by the late Metropolitan Antonie Plamadeala (Plamadeala 2004, pp.251-83, 361-78). *Via activa* (the active way), consisting of asceticism, obedience, work, service to others and prayer, was deemed more suitable for Romanians than *via contemplativa*, pure prayer being only for the most advanced. The *via media* is proper and most recommended to a cenobitic life and this is in line with the classical writings of monasticism (the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the *Rules* of Saint Basil the Great). The most renowned Romanian spiritual fathers ardently sought *hesychia*, but not in total seclusion save for certain periods of time. They were to be in society and for the people, according to the words of the late Archimandrite Cleopa Ilie, an illustrious representative of the Romanian *hesychast* tradition of the twentieth century.

As Metropolitan Antonie argues, prayer is never separated from action, and with the Romanians the Prayer of the Heart has not been assimilated as a method (Plamadeala, 2004, pp.272-3). He finds support for his view in Elder Cleopa's understanding of the *hesychast* tradition, which integrate the Jesus Prayer into a larger framework. Prayer is one aspect only, other activities being equally important include: asceticism (obedience, renouncing one's own will, guarding the mind); participation in Church services; following the monastic typicon and rule of prayer (including reciting the psalms); fasting; and, most importantly, ministering to the other, which crowns all other virtues (Plamadeala 2004, p.375). According to Elder Cleopa's understanding of the 'rules' of monastic life, such as those expressed by Saint Basil and Saint Theodore the Studite, "in the monastery, whoever does obedience in love and without grumbling, celebrates an [inner] liturgy and undergoes [a spiritual] martyrdom, and will be crowned as martyrs have been" (cited in Plamadeala 2004, p.375). On ministry to one's neighbour, Elder Cleopa is quoted as saying:

"Show yourself to be condescending and loving, but have in secret the spiritual work. This is the mystery of our life! Or as the *Paterikon* says, 'Your gain is the benefit of your brother'. [...] My rule of prayer is to give you food and water, to rest and benefit you, since, in its own order, love itself is higher than prayer. Prayer is just one of the good deeds, but love is the bond of perfection and contains all good works. [...] Do your prayer in secret and consider your ministry prayer. Be always free for the

other. Pair prayer with the good deed and vice versa" (cited in Balan 1984, p.185; Plamadeala 2004, p.378).

According to Metropolitan Antonie, this balanced approach safeguards us from extremes. The 'fools for Christ' tradition and other extreme ascetical practices are not to be found among the Romanians (Plamadeala 2004, p.372). This appears to be an observation, rather than a criticism of that tradition.

Concerning the practice of the Jesus Prayer, this was kept in line with the earlier traditions of the first millennium: Egyptian, Palestinian and Sinaitic. The prevailing currents, the early Sinaitic and late Athonite, have, in Ica's understanding, collided in Russia. Notwithstanding the enthusiastic Western reception of *The Way of a Pilgrim* (1884), whose main character was a representative of the exclusive contemplative path, ascetics such as Saints Ignatius Brianchaninov and Theophan the Recluse, did not particularly favour it. They rather followed the Sinaitic line and for both, Saint Basil of Poiana Marului is considered to offer the key to an authentic understanding of the *Philokalia* and *hesychasm* (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.48.)

As such, Ica is not endorsing the view that the post-Paisian Romanian legacy somehow corrected original Paisian spirituality and the practice of *hesychasm*, or at least adapted it to suit the Romanian spirit producing a 'Romanian version' of *hesychasm* that was practical and balanced, which Fr Staniloae terms an 'integral spirituality' (Staniloae 2002a, p.548). Basing his argument on some previous studies, by Archimandrite Ciprian Zacharia and Dan Zamfirescu, as well as on the thesis of the Italian researcher of Romanian *hesychasm* Dario Raccanello, being the first in-depth study dedicated to Saint Basil of Poiana Marului (Raccanello 1986), Ica Jr. undertakes to demonstrate that Saint Basil is key to the revival of *hesychast* spiritual literature, which had been interrupted for a number of centuries in Romania, Russia, and Greece. Saint Basil realizes the classical spiritual works in composing his very popular and useful 'forewords' to those works. He thus produces a first blend of Slavic and Greek spiritually with Romanian overtones. He is the forerunner of Saint Paisius and of the Greek *philokalic* revival of the eighteenth century (Ica Jr. 2009a, pp.30-3.) and a true model to subsequent generations of great Romanian monastic figures, such as the saints Gheorghe and Calinic of Cernica.

According to Ica, it may well have been that Fr Staniloae overreacted to Communist propaganda, which used the legacy of Saint Paisius to show the close ties of Romanians and Russians (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.25). Thus, Staniloae, and Plamadeala too, have instead tried to show the

opposite, being a distinct Romanian tradition of Saint Gheorghe and Saint Calinic of Cernica, the former a direct disciple of Saint Paisius. Both Staniloae and Plamadeala believed that they had adapted Saint Paisius' teaching, which could not be grafted onto Romanian monasticism in its radical form.

The Romanian philokalic manuscript tradition

There was a rich Romanian manuscript-based patristic tradition in the form of *philokalic* texts, which were in circulation in Romanian monasteries before the publication of the Greek *Philokalia* at Venice in 1782.

An early manuscript, called *The Branch of Eden*, dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century, emerged from the Slatina Monastery and contained texts from Saint Gregory of Sinai, Saint Symeon the New Theologian and other ascetic Fathers (Plamadeala 2004, pp.270-271). The manuscript is preserved in the library of the Metropolis of Iasi. A Romanian *Philokalia*, along with a Slavonic version, was produced by Saint Paisius' disciples in 1769 and was in circulation in manuscript form (MS 2597 preserved in the library of the Romanian Academy). This would have been the first translation of the *Philokalia* into a modern language (Candea 1997, p.25). It contained a collection of texts on the Prayer of the Heart by St Symeon the New Theologian, St Gregory of Sinai, St Symeon of Thessaloniki, St Mark of Ephesus (Evgenikos), St Nicephorus the Solitary, St Nilus (Evagrius), St John Cassian, St Basil the Great and some other texts; plus St Nilus Sorski and the forewords of St Basil of Poiana Marului to the writings of St Gregory of Sinai. Another Romanian translation of the Greek *Philokalia* of 1782 was produced in 1800, but, again, it did not see the light of a printed edition (MS 1455, Romanian Academy). This manuscript contains 1004 pages, with 18 authors from the Greek Venetian version and adding works from two more, Saint Mark the Monk (the Solitary) and Saint Maximus the Confessor. The translators, Saint Paisius' disciples, treated the existing Romanian translations as authoritative. The existence of experienced Romanian translators who were specialized in the Greek language greatly assisted Saint Paisius' activity (Candea 1997, p.25). It seems that the pattern of work that was often followed, at first, involved translations from Greek into Romanian and then from Romanian into Slavonic (Ciubotea 1997, p.11).

Another earlier version of the *Philokalia* is a manuscript from the Romanian Athonite *Skete* of Prodromou, copied in 1766 (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.34). Combined with other writings at the beginning of the twentieth

century, between 1911 and 1922, it contained about 1614 pages, and this ought to have been the Romanian counterpart of the Greek *Philokalia*. Once again, this manuscript did not see the light of a printed edition. It was, however, used later as one of the working copies for Fr Staniloae's grand project in publishing the Romanian *Philokalia*. In the preface of the first edition of the *Philokalia*, Fr Staniloae mentions Fr Arsenie Boca, a renowned spiritual father and collaborator during his early work on the *Philokalia*, who brought him manuscripts from Mount Athos.

Ica notes that the Russians were very fortunate to benefit from the successful early publication of ascetic writings, as well as from the ascetic *philokalic* practices that had been established in the conscience of the people (via the *Paisian* route), unlike the Romanians, who only circulated those writings in manuscript form, mostly in monastic circles, until the twentieth century. The Greeks, who had published them, somehow failed to disseminate them on a large scale and kept them primarily for monastics (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.14). Hence, in Ica's estimation, the Greeks had the book, the Romanians had the school, and the Russians had the book and the movement (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.14)!

The old languages, Greek Patristic-Byzantine and old Slavonic, did not help the dissemination of *philokalic* writings and spirituality on a large scale. The Patristic-Byzantine Greek of the 1782 edition was not understood by most Greek monks and the same was true of the Slavonic version of Saint Paisius published in Moscow in 1793, which was followed by the popular edition of Saint Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), in spoken Russian (the Dobrotolubiye, published between 1876-1890), which made the *Philokalia* a book accessible to all people (see Ware 1991, p.46). This was the book carried by the character of the popular nineteenth century writing *The Way of a Pilgrim*. To this, the addition of hostile political conditions, the struggle for independence by the Greek and Romanian nations, and the secularization of monastic properties and assets (in Greece, Romania and Russia), made the expensive enterprise of printing and distributing the books even more difficult (Ica Jr. 2009a, p.14).

As is already known, Saint Paisius and his disciples also contributed to the Russian spiritual revival of the nineteenth century. After 1780, many of Paisius' disciples came to Russia, where they were seminal in the emergence of the *startsy* phenomenon connected to the Optina Monastery. The first two famous elders of Optina were of direct Paisian descent, being disciples of two of Saint Paisius' close disciples, Theodor, who went to Varlaam Monastery and counted Leonida (1764-1841), the future *starets* of Optina, as a disciple; and Affanasiev, who held copies of

all the manuscripts produced or corrected by Saint Paisius and had the young Makarius (1788-1860), the next *starets* of Optina, under his spiritual care. Elder Makarius, assisted by the philosopher Ivan Kireievski, published many of Saint Paisius' Slavonic translations into Russian, preparing the transition from old Slavonic to the spoken Russian *Philokalia* of Saint Theophan the Recluse (Ica Jr. 2009a, pp.15-6).

Patriarch Daniel of Romania has noted that the Romanians played a crucial role in the history of the *Philokalia*. The first official printed *Philokalia*, the Venetian Greek version of 1782, was financed by a Greek-Romanian, Prince Ioan Mavrocordat (Ciubotea 2004, pp.439-40). The first Slavonic version, the 1793 *Dobrotolubiye*, used Saint Paisius and his disciples' translations produced in Moldavia at Neamt monastery. Patriarch Daniel does not fail also to mention the achievement of his teacher, Fr Staniloae, who produced "the first *Philokalia* with commentaries" (Ciubotea 2004, p.15). This monumental work is the largest collection of patristic *philokalic* texts to date; it was translated, edited, introduced and provided with commentaries written by Fr Staniloae. Fr Staniloae's version goes beyond the content of the original Greek *Philokalia* of 1782, adding works from Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint Gregory Palamas, the *Ladder* of Saint John Climacus, Saint Isaac the Syrian, the correspondence of Abba Barsanuphius and John, the *Ascetikon* of Abba Isaiah, among some other spiritual works.

The Reception of Saint Gregory Palamas in Romanian Orthodoxy

It is true that, as in other parts of the Orthodox world (Russia for example), the reception of Saint Gregory Palamas' works and his theology, was slow in Romanian Orthodoxy. This has been attributed to its 'heavy theological content', as Saint Paisius himself acknowledged in his time. In the past, only a very limited number of works circulated in old manuscripts, some of which dated back to Saint Gregory's own time.

The disputes with the Roman Catholic Church, generated by the Palamite controversy, blocked, for a long time, the publication of the Greek corpus of Saint Gregory's works (Ica Jr. 2009b, pp.9-12). Furthermore, as already mentioned, Saint Gregory's theological-mystical synthesis was not easily accessible and assimilated. Instead, the more practical Sinaitic *hesychasm* (e.g., that promoted by Saint John Climacus in the popular classic *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* and by Saint Gregory of Sinai) was more readily transmitted and assimilated in the Romanian provinces (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.148). This also holds true for the Slavic world

(see von Lilienfeld 1958, pp.436-48). Despite all this, Saint Gregory Palamas not being at the forefront of the neo-*hesychast* revival, was still part of it. As the late Fr Constantin Galeriu put it: "how alive and natural has sprung up Saint Gregory Palamas in the heart of Romanian Orthodoxy" (Galeriu 2000, p.xi). He was revered and loved even before being better known through the pen of Fr Dumitru Staniloae (Galeriu 2000, p.xi).

Fr Staniloae made the step forward, translating and, at the same time, producing a historical, dogmatic and spiritual exegesis that inaugurated a dogmatic-experiential type of patristic scholarship, prompting the well-known revival in Romanian theology. His first Palamite translations and accompanying studies were published between 1929 and 1933. These included a first study, 'The way towards divine light in St Gregory Palamas' and a translation of two treatises, the first translation into a modern language of the Second ('On prayer') and the Third Treatise ('On the divine light') of Saint Gregory's First Triad against Balaam in defence of the *hesychasts*.

In the first article on Saint Gregory Palamas' theology of divine light, Fr Staniloae's contests the common opinion expressed in the historical texts of the Church, namely, that after Saint John of Damascus nothing much happened in Byzantine theology. As Ica has observed, Fr Staniloae did make the point that, while in early patristic theology there were many metaphysic formulations and intellectual developments of the Christian faith, Byzantine theology, for its part, was "profoundly personal" (centred on the human person), "a theology of one's spiritual experience", "imprinted with the seal of the monastic spirit" and sought "to describe the contact of the pure heart with God" (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.28; cf. Staniloae 1929/1930, pp.55-56). The *hesychasts* did not seek to meditate or contemplate God, but to 'possess' Him (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.28; cf. Staniloae 1929/1930, p.56).

In Fr Staniloae's major study, *The Life and Teaching of St Gregory Palamas* (1938), which also contains the translation of four treatises, two of which he had previously published, Fr Staniloae's declared aim was to be part of the initiative, which he encouraged, to see the restoration of truth in the history of Orthodoxy; an initiative dating from 1054 up to the present time (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.32; cf. Staniloae 1938, p.8). The study is also a response to the Roman Catholic critique of Palamas in Martin Jugie's study and articles published in 1932. At the same time, Fr Staniloae also calls for a self-critical examination of the scholastic manuals of Orthodox theology of the time (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.30).

In this study, Fr Staniloae meticulously reconstitutes the historical events related to the 1341 Synod of Constantinople (Staniloae 1938, pp.116-50) and the details around the civil war of 1341-1347, points of which Ica considers still valid in current research (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.32). As one may expect, Western scholars questioned his study on the presentation of the Palamite disputes, but the overall conclusions were positively received by Jean Gouillard (Gouillard 1938, pp.447-55). Ica also presents Staniloae's pertinent critical analysis of Gouillard's position (see Ica Jr. 2009b, pp.33-4).

In 1947, Fr Staniloae delivered a university course on Orthodox asceticism and mysticism; in the words of Ica, this was “a veritable neo-Palamite mystical *theognosis*, a tour de force, encompassing almost the entire Eastern tradition of spirituality presented in the classical threefold ladder of ascent: dispassion, illumination and union with God” (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.35). This was published in Romanian in 1981 and subsequently translated and published in other languages, including English (Staniloae, 2002b).

Half of the seventh volume of the Romanian *Philokalia* is dedicated by Fr Staniloae to the writings of Saint Gregory Palamas, with abundant footnotes provided. Staniloae only chose two works from the Greek *Philokalia* (the *Hagiorite Tomos* and the *150 Chapters*), adding instead Palamas' works from the Second Triad, and treatises Two ('On the Prayer of the Heart') and Three ('Seeing the Divine Light')—previously published as his very first Palamite translations—along with Saint Gregory's exposition of the Homily of Saint John Chrysostom on the Protomartyr Stephen and the treatise on the deification of saints. These footnotes amount to a truly monumental commentary on the theology of Saint Gregory and make Palamas' writings more accessible to a contemporary audience. Fr Staniloae opens the theology of divine energies up to all who may wish to follow the pathway of holiness, speaking to the reader with both academic rigour and experiential authority. One can sense an almost unusual familiarity with the theology of divine energies and divine light. Staniloae speaks of lofty spiritual things as if these were part of his own experiences. If one were only to read these footnotes, without the actual main text, he or she would gain an adequate grasp of Saint Gregory's theology and understand how it sits within the entire Eastern tradition, from Ps.Dionysius up to our time.

Another striking Palamite feature, noticed by Ica, is to be found in Fr Staniloae's by now famous *Dogmatic Theology*, particularly with the first volume where he treats all of God's attributes as divine energies communicated to human beings and through which they participate in God

in a real way (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.36). The entire theology of Fr Staniloae is permeated by that of Saint Gregory. We can perhaps rightly say that Fr Staniloae brought Saint Gregory to light and, in turn, Saint Gregory made his theology better.

Another important chapter in Fr Staniloae's *hesychast* explorations was his involvement in the circle known as the *Burning Bush* movement, which met at the Antim Monastery in the heart of Bucharest; while this shows Fr Staniloae's effort to make Palamism known to his fellow Romanians, it is interesting to note here that, because of his 'membership' of this group, he was imprisoned for five years by the Communist regime.

In the Orthodox world, Fr Staniloae was appreciated by John Meyendorff, even though at the time of the publication of his own work on Saint Gregory Palamas, he did not have access to Fr Staniloae's study. Meyendorff considered Staniloae the first scholar, after the French Jean Bolvin who in 1702 published extracts of Palamite manuscripts, to have studied and quoted the unpublished original works of Palamas (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.38).

There have since been a handful of articles, and some other translations into Romanian, including some of Saint Gregory's spiritual writings (epistles, homilies), which complement Fr Staniloae's work, but nothing of the same scale until recently, when, following in the footsteps of Fr Staniloae, Professor Deacon Ioan Ica Jr. started a project translating, introducing (with well-documented studies) and publishing Saint Gregory's complete works, thus rounding out Fr Staniloae's work and giving further impetus to Saint Gregory's true philosophy and '*hesychasm* for all' in Romania. Ica's contribution to the field of Palamite Studies traces the journey of Palamas' theology from its beginnings up to our time. His writing distinguishes itself by its clarity of exposition in dealing with the historical evidence, while elegantly exposing the challenges of modern scholarship in recent decades.

Ica's first study, *Gregory Palamas: Virgin Mary and Peter the Athonite, Prototypes of the Hesychast Life and other Spiritual Writings*, was deliberately published before Saint Gregory's polemical works, based on the view that the theology of uncreated energies is best explained from the starting point of *hesychast* spirituality.

In his latest study, *Gregory Palamas: Dogmatic Tomoses: Life and Service*, published in 2009, on the occasion, among others, of the celebration of 650 years after the Saint's death and 70 years after the publication of Fr Staniloae's study, Ica's introductory study reconstitutes, for the first time in Romanian and also in a modern language, the important moments that contributed to the canonization of the teaching

and person of Saint Gregory Palamas, and the odyssey of editing and publishing his works. The study also details the life and service to the Saint written by Philotheos Kokkinos, as well as Saint Gregory's letters from his Ottoman captivity, along with four preserved prayers.

The long journey of editing and publishing the works of Saint Gregory Palamas started with a first attempt (1624-1627) by Kyrill Lukaris, Patriarch of Alexandria, which was eventually blocked by the Jesuits of Constantinople who attacked the teaching and the Saint's holiness in life (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.9). The second attempt at publishing Saint Gregory's corpus was made in Moscow in 1693, but it failed due to disputes between the adherents of the Greek and Latin (Kievan) schools (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.11). The third attempt, a three-volume manuscript collection sent by Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite in 1796 to Vienna, was unfortunately lost, as the publishing house was forcibly closed by the Austrian authorities at Turkish instigation who were in pursuit of Greek nationalists. The only surviving document from this manuscript is Saint Nicodemus' valuable introduction (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.15).

Nonetheless, between 1694 and 1705, Patriarch Dositheus II Notaras of Jerusalem, successfully published an anti-Latin trilogy in the Romanian provinces: *Tomos Katallaghis* ('The Tomos of reconciliation' against Filioque), published in Iasi in 1694; *Tomos Agapis* ('The Tomos of Love' in defence of Saint Gregory), published again in Iasi in 1698; and finally, *Tomos Charas* ('The Tomos of Joy' against papal primacy), published in Ramnic, in 1705, this being the first editing of a Hagiorite tomos on Romanian territory (Ica Jr. 2009b, p.10).

In his study, Ica appreciates, as a particular contribution, the genuine initial efforts at a reunion of the *hesychast Basileus* Ioannes VI Cantacuzenus¹, Monk Ioasaf after taking the monastic habit. Ica also considers "a revelation" the study of Petre Guran of a miniature in a Paris codex of a fourteenth century manuscript (Gr. 1241), which depicts the Byzantine *Basileus* together with Saint John the Theologian, Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Saint Symeon the New Theologian and Saint Gregory Palamas. In Guran's interpretation, this particular piece of work revealed a change of view, theological and political, regarding the function of the empire and of the Church towards the Christian *oikumene*. Instead of a political *hesychasm* (advocated by G. Prohorov) or a theology of history (cf. J. Meyendorff), Guran proposed an eschatological *hesychasm*, which

¹ *Βασιλεύς* (translation in English: King) is the title of the Byzantine Emperor after the time of Heraclius (575-641). John VI Kantakouzenos, Cantacuzenus, or Cantacuzene (Greek: Ἰωάννης ΣΤ' Καντακουζηνός, c.1292-1383) was a close friend of Palamas, helping him become Archbishop of Thessaloniki.

sought to free Orthodoxy from the apocalyptic obsession and anguish of the end of time, as well as from the mirage of a divine empire. The monk-emperor is held as the symbol and promoter of the transformation of this new world order.

A young Romanian exegete of Palamas' theology, Ignatie Trif, currently the Bishop of Husi in the Romanian Orthodox Church, has written a well-documented doctoral thesis, researched in Greece, Romania and elsewhere and currently being prepared for publication. I refer here, with permission, to the Romanian manuscript.

This study has the merit of thoroughly grounding the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas in the best of the Eastern Christian tradition, presenting it as an *authentic and dynamic* development of the patristic tradition and rooting Saint Gregory's theological discourse in the Old Testament antinomy of *seeing vs. not seeing* God, then tracing it through the early and late Church Fathers, Clement and Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers, John Chrysostom, and, as one may expect, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus and Symeon the New Theologian, before finally ending with Hierotheus, the thirteenth century forerunner of Palamite theology. Bishop Ignatie argues that although Palamite theology bears the name of the one who made it best known, it is not a new theology, but a different contextual method than the one used by the preceding Fathers: "If the Cappadocian theology developed the relationship between energies within a Christological context, or indeed a cosmological one, as in the case of Saint Maximus, Saint Gregory integrates this relationship within an anthropological, and implicitly, soteriological context, including triadology, Christology as well as cosmology" (Trif 2011, pp.147-8). Bishop Ignatie is critical of some methodologically established clichés, which see the debate as an opposition between representatives of humanism and philosophy, on the one hand, and Platonizing mysticism on the other (Meyendorff); or of the war between Western Aristotelian Thomism and Eastern Platonist/Neoplatonist Palamism (Trif 2011, p.65). In his estimation, "[i]f these general labels cannot do, the main issue is the correct understanding of the antinomic and theological relationship between the absolute transcendence and inherent immanence of God (though not in the sense of necessity)", resolved in an active, dynamic *aphophatism*, which, unlike the position of Saint Gregory's opponents, is not locked in a closed and static apophatic theology and that eventually ends up in agnosticism (Trif 2011, pp.65-6). Palamas' theology of *hesychasm* balances God's transcendence and immanence, by "sensing God in an intelligible way and seeing Him [...], in the radiant beauty of the uncreated energies" (Trif 2011, p.66). Hence,

we have different theological approaches to *apophatism* and antinomy in God, focused on the issues of transcendence and immanence, which are the two sides of the same reality (Trif 2011, p.66).

At the conclusion of his study, Bishop Ignatie makes a bold statement: “The theology of the uncreated energies is the theology of God offering himself to human beings. It is the betrothal between Life (energies) and Mystery (being)” (Trif 2011, p.268). In turn, human beings can truly know God if they live in God, if they ‘possess’ God and if God ‘possesses’ them. Otherwise, those who venture to speak of God, as Saint Gregory puts it, can only tell things they have heard others say, but have never experienced themselves: “one does not experience God by meditating and theologizing about Him [...] if you do not suffer or experience the divine and do not see it with intelligible eyes, beyond thinking, you do not see, you do not have and do not truly possess anything from the divine” (St Gregory Palamas, ‘Third Treatise from the First Triade’, cited in Staniloae 1938, p.315 and Trif 2011, p.268).

Contemporary *hesychasm* in Romania

The practice of spiritual fatherhood underwent a revival in the 1990s, with many young people turning towards monasteries for guidance, some even becoming monastics, mostly because they read the *Philokalia* and found and attached themselves to a charismatic spiritual father. Despite a recent decline in the monastic vocation, the *Philokalic* ethos is still very much alive in both monasticism and in the world, among more serious seekers of spiritual enlightenment. *Hesychasm*, perhaps in the form that Fr Staniloae, Metropolitan Antonie and Fr Cleopa have advocated, based on unceasing prayer and service to the community, is at the centre of the monastic life. There are also secluded monastics, who adopt a more radical form of *hesychasm*.

Some years ago, I toured places where some influential spiritual fathers lived and I had the privilege of speaking to some of them. Although each of those spiritual fathers season the practice of spiritual fatherhood with their personal approach, the overall impression was that they all belonged to the same universal spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church. The diversity of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, however, is nowhere else sensed as in the *hesychast* practice where one may seem puzzled by the options. The spiritual father seeks to set each one’s measure according to personal aspirations and potential. Most exponents of Orthodox spirituality say that inner peace comes from obedience, which leads to humility and true prayer. The Jesus Prayer is a call for all Christians,

to be performed anywhere and at any time. The late Archimandrite Arsenie Papacioc, a contemporary and friend of Fr Cleopa, used to teach, in his talks and books, that eternity is hidden in a moment, that of the present one, and, if we wish, we can turn every moment of our life into a prayer "every sighing of ours, if offered to God, can be a prayer" (Papacioc 2004).

Given the geographical and cultural proximity of Romanian Orthodoxy to both the Greek-Byzantine and Slavic worlds, its spirituality may have another role to play in the current pan-Orthodox revival of *hesychast* theology, spirituality and practice. Romanian Orthodoxy could have a role not only in the dissemination of the spiritual writings of the *Philokalia*, which today's world no longer lacks, the *Philokalia* now having been translated into all major international languages, but, more importantly, in actively promoting a thriving and balanced spirituality, able to produce spiritual fathers of the stature of those of the past. The century-long tradition of *philokalic* spirituality and practice may be needed in places where Orthodoxy is still young (e.g., among the diaspora) and need the backing of a living, balanced, tradition.

Hesychasm: the next level

The theology of uncreated energies, which in Orthodox spirituality is the real basis of deification, is the sublime expression of the extraordinary calling of human beings to unite with their creator. In some quarters, Christians of other denominations find the Palamite discourse a source of inspiration, revitalizing their vision and thus drawing them closer to the theology and spirituality of the Orthodox Church. Yet, Palamas' theology is still ignored, criticised or even derided in some Western circles. One may examine the scandalous and utterly off-the-point online article in the Catholic Encyclopedia for the entry on *hesychasm* (Catholic Encyclopedia 2019). The rift between Orthodoxy and the West, be it Catholic or Protestant, is nowhere more sensible than in the positioning of man in relation to God. In the West, that is either objective and thus rational-intellectual, or subjective and emotional as such, both of these approaches being limited and undermined by either mechanical theories about the world and rationalism or pietism on the other hand. By their nature, these positions cannot be open to the infinite possibilities of an integral ontology of body and soul and of a *theosis* of human beings. In the divine light, the saints see God intuitively as he is, face to face, in a way very different to the rational discursive position. These differences of perspective represent a rift that still keeps Eastern and Western Christianity

apart and will need to be addressed head on, time and again, in the ecumenical encounter between the East and the West. Palamite theology and the *hesychastic* experience of grace can no longer be regarded as “*exotic mysticism*”, nor as a “most curious chapter in the history of the Byzantine Church, in itself an obscure speculation, with the wildest form of mystic extravagance ... the only great mystic movement in the Orthodox Church” (Catholic Encyclopedia, 2019), because they represent the core of the Eastern Orthodox Christian ethos and are an integral part of its dogma and spirituality. Thus, the theology and practice of *hesychasm* may be Orthodoxy’s best presentation in the ecumenical encounter with other Christian traditions in the search for unity. According to the Eastern Orthodox Church, this unity can only be achieved through orthodoxy of belief and practice, leading to holiness.

Finally, due the popularity of the Jesus Prayer and some *hesychastic* practices outside Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodox Christians may also find a point of contact with those outside the Christian tradition. With that in mind, we may hope to look forward to a post-neo-*hesychast* revival of universal significance.

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4. HESYCHIA, SALVATION, INEFFABILITY, AND QUIETUDE: ST GREGORY PALAMAS AND L. WITTGENSTEIN ON THE ESCAPIST AND FUTILE MISCONCEPTIONS OF ONTOLOGICAL SALVATION AND METAPHYSICAL HINGES

DR. CONSTANTINOS ATHANASOPOULOS

Abstract: I start with the discussion of some key elements of ancient Greek ethics (tracing a line from Homer to Aristotle via Plato: non-rationalist; metaphysics connected to and one with ethics; various human discourses and endeavours having to do with praxis are unified). I try to see how for ancient Greek philosophers (and even philosophers of other traditions and epochs, such as contemporary philosophers and Christian philosophers, such as St Gregory Palamas), the issues of Greek ethics and metaphysics leave a person with unsolved problems and a longing for (philosophical) salvation. Then, I move on to Wittgenstein's views on ethics. I use here language games, the unsayable, hinges, and forms of life as key parts of the Wittgensteinian puzzle. I finish with Palamas' views on hesychasm; I find that Palamas not only continues the ancient Greek tradition of ethics (in at least some of its agenda having to do with salvation) but also comes close to Wittgenstein's views on ethics.

Keywords: Greek ethics, akrasia, hesychasm, Palamas, Wittgenstein, salvation, asceticism, mysticism, ineffability.

A. The Problem: Whence lies salvation? Some answers from the ancient Greeks

There are many ways to approach the problem of how best to interpret the aims and role of ancient Greek ethics and its key characteristics.

Some see it as an attempt by the ancient Greeks to make sense of their life in their context of social and political conflicts, extreme violence and their struggle for survival (see for example Johansen 1998, p.2, who claims that for the Greeks “the world was considered a rational orderly whole and in many ways the cosmic order was considered to be moral as well”; see also Vernant 1987; Irwin 2007). These theorists emphasise rationality as the key to understanding ancient Greek ethics. In this perspective, the ancient Greeks strove to be good because this is what made sense to them. It was the most rational thing to do in their social and political context and their ethics was a rational attempt to create a guide and code of conduct for social affairs. One could observe here that there are many overgeneralisations and factual inaccuracies regarding the specifics of ancient Greek ethics presented in the view of the above-mentioned scholars and their followers; for example, there is no satisfactory explanation of the irrational moral behaviour among the ancient Greek gods and associated mythology- note that some of the behaviour of these gods (even though irrational) provided parts of the moral code of the ancient Greeks (see the example of Xenios Zeus). In addition, one cannot but notice an anachronistic Kantian twist in such an approach (see the relevant discussion of Aristotle’s ideas on friendship as contrary to most modern moral philosophy, including Kant, in Nehamas 2010).

However, I wish to claim the main reason for rejecting such an approach is not just the distance in time (and the different social-political context), which makes such a Kantian approach to Greek Ethics so implausible; it is also the culturally specific Hellenic context and the specific cultural vision of the ancient Greeks (Nehamas 2010). Their cosmology, religious myths, and customs had nothing to do with puritan Kantian theism, where God becomes a logical necessity (see Kant 1793; Hare 2011; Firestone and Palmquist 2006)—impersonal, universal and vague, a more or less rational idea about transcendence. For the ancient Greeks, gods were in their ontology and behaviour (if you take away their significant powers and immortality) like humans; they were concrete and had unique characteristics, placed within their circumstances of existence. Their main difference from mortals was focused on their immortality and their enhanced power. The ancient Greeks lived life to the full and avoided the cold, impartial, and calculated measurements of universal law. To be good, for them, required different kinds of behaviour, which depended on who the person doing the good was, what his role in society was, and what part he played in the cosmos. Gods, for them, were more powerful than humans, but, in essence, they were humanlike competitors in their struggle to experience life to the full; in some occasions, they were even

antagonists, interfering with humans to keep them back and punish them for desiring to be something they were not (Σακελλαρίου 1796; Anton 1860). This cosmology, which was in essence both a philosophical and a religious outlook on life and the universe, is what made the Homeric epics so attractive to the ancient Greeks (in my approach here I am strongly in favour of Vlastos' attempt to bring religion into the early history of the philosophy of the Greeks; see Vlastos 1952; see also Jaeger 1948). This cosmology (and its associated anthropology) is that which is depicted and sung in the Homeric epics, describing the war between the Greeks and the Trojans around 1300 B.C., and what happened to Odysseus after the fall of Troy. Drama, as a superb and unique art form, was developed by the Greeks around the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. (not long after the oral tradition of the Homeric epics was produced in written form for the first time) to celebrate Dionysus, the god of wine, mysticism, and festivities. This artform allowed the Greeks to think more about the significance of the Homeric epics, the Homeric gods, and their mythology; the tragedies produced made them think about their human greatness in weakness and vulnerability. Tragedy, in this way, as the fulfilment of the agenda found in the Homeric epics, became the Greek *coup d'état* against the cosmos (for the relation of tragedy to philosophy see the work of Critchley 2019). It is a grave mistake to disengage ancient Greek ethics (and, in general, all other areas of philosophy) from its roots in Homeric works. The Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Sceptics, the Cynics, Epicurus, Epictetus, and the Stoics developed and created their own syntheses based on Homeric moral understanding, values, and ways of seeing the world and acting in it. This is because parts of the Homeric epics were standard textbook material for all Greek children whose parents had the means to pay tutors and thus, be provided with the necessary education (Σακελλαρίου 1796; Jaeger 1986).

Let us start then with Homer. What are the key ethical ideas we find in the Homeric epics (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*)? In these texts, we find that it is the heroic deed that makes you immortal, against the will of the immortals. Achilles epitomizes this endeavour. In the *Iliad*, we see in Achilles the model of the Homeric hero; one who defies the gods, strives for excellence and pays the price for glory in death. But this death is not shameful. It is the death of Achilles: dying on the battlefield, while striving to excel (note that this was the guiding principle he received from his father: *αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων* 'always strive to excel and be better than all the rest' in *Ιλιάδα* Λ, 784; also see *Ιλιάδα*, Z, 208, where Ippolachos gives the same advice to his son Glaukos, a fact which indicates that this view on excellence was shared widely among the

Greeks). It is, however, still a death, and one that the ancient Greeks (trying always to live their lives to the fullest) found quite tragic—even an Achilles full of glory, longs for life and salvation from death. Note that in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus, upon meeting Achilles in Hades, compliments Achilles as the happiest and most blessed of all mortals, Achilles replies that he is “a shadow of Achilles” and that he would prefer to be alive and an insignificant and humble servant rather than be “Achilles and dead” (*Οδύσσεια* λ, 465-491).

Is there any rationality (at least in terms of our moral standards of rationality) in all of this? Of course not. In another work, I argued against any rationalistic attempts to appropriate the richness of Homeric ethics and make it more suited to (and digestible for) our contemporary moral standards. Having as a focus the relevant work of Nicholas D. Smith, I argued that any attempt to use a rationalist Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* to understand some of the morality of the Homeric epics is a rather poor and unimaginative attempt to approach Homeric ethical ideals, with their focus on heroic ethics (Athanasopoulos 2011; but note that I distance myself from Dodds 1962: I do not claim that Homeric ethics is irrational, just non-rational). In my approach, I also oppose the interpretation of some researchers, such as Apressyan, who think that Homeric society is “a society of *arising* morality” (Apressyan 2014, p.68). In the Homeric epics, we see a fully worked out ethical system; the audience of the Homeric epics was moved to noble and moral action and examples of the behaviour of Homeric heroes were analysed and used by Plato and Aristotle to teach about ethics. That we (today) do not recognise Homeric ethics as offering a fully worked out system of morals is due to our Kantian and Hegelian heritage. For a Kantian moral philosopher, Homeric society cannot have morality, because there is no evidence of a consistent system of reference to a universal law of moral conduct. In my perspective, morality cannot be distinguished from one’s life (it is not the same concept, but it is inextricably connected to it). How one chooses to live creates his morality. In Homer we see that people have a specific mindset about life: they have a theory about what is life and what is death, how humans and gods behave, and how they should behave. We have, in this way, a specific Homeric metaphysics (about the cosmos, human life, and the gods) that guides them in their moral conduct and their ethical intuitions. In this way, the Homeric epics describe not only the metaphysics but also the morality of Homeric society. That we find it difficult to understand and categorise this morality appropriately with our conceptual myopia is our fault, not Homer’s nor the fault of the society that he described. Whether one chooses to follow a universal law of

morality is irrelevant here. I stress that my approach is far from any such (Kantian) attempt to understand Homeric society and its ethics.

Let us move now to Plato, which is the second stop in our investigation. Undoubtedly, we could make further stops in the history of Greek ethics, addressing those such as the Presocratics, but for ease of reference and in the context of the limited space of this work, I will only refer to Plato and Aristotle (who is going to provide us with material for our third stop in our investigation). In Plato, we find again metaphysics guiding ethics. We have the theory of the tripartite soul that inhabits a body as its prison and the theory of Forms: all ethical ideals and models of life should have these Forms of the 'good' and the 'just' firmly fixed as their point of reference. The soul's survival and a positive fate depend on this (see Shields 2010; Bussanich 2013). In the *Republic*, the philosophers who know these Forms are the ones that should be responsible (as educators of their society) to guide and steer by necessity (*ανάγκη*) all people into incorporating these into their ethical frames of reference (because only the philosophers are the only ones that can be truly virtuous—see *Republic*, 500B–540C; Irwin 1995; Bobonitch 2002). The philosopher king is thus elevated to the point of *Demiurge* in social affairs: being aware of his lack of self-sufficiency (because, after all, he is only a mortal), he creates a natural and cultural-social environment where laws and customs are to produce a new human, saved from all corruption, both in his soul and in his body, motivated to always do what is good and just. Note, however, that this picture leaves many questions without an adequate answer. One problem is to do with motivation: how is one to motivate the majority of the people to follow the philosophers in this social engineering? This is a serious problem because in Book 7 of the *Republic* it becomes clear that the aims of the virtuous and knowledgeable philosophers are not the same as the aims of the majority (who are more interested in luxury and comfort than the knowledge of the Forms; see Duncan and Steiberger 1990). Even though we may see the philosopher-king as a milestone in the creation of this new (improved) version of humanity, little is said about what this new human will look like and what his main characteristics will be (see Dobbs 2003, pp.1081–2). There have been attempts to find a solution to the problem of moral motivation; many commentators in ancient and Byzantine times noted that Aristotle's ethical and political theory was a solution to Plato's problem of moral motivation. In more recent times, researchers have looked to other works for a solution (see Vasiliou 2015) but with poor results; one could ask here: is it not itself a problem that Plato leaves this issue unresolved here?

Another (but related) problem is that of *akrasia* (ἀκρασία). *Akrasia* (which has been translated as ‘weakness of the will’—a term and a concept that is not the same) is a major problem for Plato’s ethical theory. This is because Socrates believes that no one knowingly or willingly does wrong; to know that something is bad and nevertheless to go ahead and do it makes this action incomprehensible. But the reality is different. Many people do what is wrong, even if they know that it is bad. And, what is worse, they desire to do it again (and will do it again and again, given the chance). Look at how difficult (even impossible) it is for people to give up smoking or stop using addictive substances. They know that it is bad for them to engage in these activities and nevertheless they keep on doing them. Surely, they should be able to stop their addictive habits through reading, understanding, and absorbing the *Republic* (and perhaps other philosophical treatises on human development or even some key self-help books) but they are not. Here, we find researchers who claim that for Socrates’ perspective there is no problem to solve here because, if one’s passions allow him to see clearly the truth in a given situation, then he will do the action that corresponds to this truth without been influenced by his passions in his resolve (see Brickhouse and Smith 2007). But this is too weak: we have *akrasia* when we see that the contemplated action is wrong; so, in this sense, we know the truth. And we nevertheless do this action that we see as wrong. One can argue that for the philosopher-king in the *Republic*, *akrasia* is impossible (see Shields 2007); his soul is so unified, simple, and so seamless in thought and action, that *akrasia* is an impossibility for him. But, taking into consideration that for Plato there was no such philosopher-king in existence in his time, it begs the question as to how realistic such an idea really is. So, it seems that in Plato we find serious problems not only in his social philosophy but also with his anthropology, especially in relation to moral psychology, which makes it impossible for humans to find a solution to their problems in life (esp. in the quite frequent cases of *akrasia*). Moral people need to find a meaning that will solve their social and moral problems (esp. those like the one of *akrasia*). We can see here that the ancient Greeks would have found Plato to have both failed them and reminded them of the tragic reality of their lives (which they had learned to recognise via Homer and ancient Greek drama); their vulnerability encompasses them from all sides (both personal and social) and they see that there is no salvation, even if they accept the belief in almighty reason offered by Plato’s *Republic* (I will define “salvation” in detail in the following section).

Let us proceed now to Aristotle. For most commentators on ancient Greek philosophy, one can find in Aristotle a more unified system

of thought, one that makes finding answers easier and avoids discrepancies and contradictions. But, even for believers in this consistent unification of metaphysics and ethics (which is easier to achieve in the Aristotelian corpus because they have the form of lecture notes as a purposeful attempt to avoid unanswered questions), there remain problems that are left unresolved. One of the key ideas in Aristotle's ethics is the idea that humans pursue the good so that they can achieve *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία, a term that has been translated as "happiness", which I consider rather poor because it does not refer to the "daimon" part of the Greek word; a better translation might be: "what is pleasing to the gods"; see further in Athanasopoulos 2018). This provides answers to the problem of sufficiently motivating the majority to follow a minority of knowledgeable rulers and the problem of *akrasia* (Plato tried to solve this problem in later work, such as the *Republic*, but the problem of insufficient motivation remained, even though it mutated; see Brickhouse and Smith 2010, pp.193-247). The solution that was provided with *eudaimonia*, however, created more problems for Aristotle, as we will see.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides both a formal definition of *eudaimonia* (i.e., the general principles that one can have in mind when considering the application of the term) and a material definition of it (i.e., Aristotle examines what kind of life satisfies the principles of the application of the term). Let us examine in more detail the views of Aristotle (which were the focus of St Gregory Palamas' studies as a young man while at the University of Constantinople, being taught by Theodoros Metochites, 1270-1332, a famous Aristotelian of the time and a personal adviser to Byzantine emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, 1259-1332). Aristotle points out, in the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics* (one of the key works in Aristotelian ethics) that *eudaimonia* is a good that we desire for its own sake (1095a15-22).

From Aristotle's discussion of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can establish that it has three key characteristics:

1. Aristotle thinks *eudaimonia* is not a psychological state, nor a state of the mind, but rather an activity—the activity of living with virtue. A good life is one that realises the full potential of human life (1098b30-1).

2. *Eudaimonia* is not something subjective that depends on the way people individually perceive it. For Aristotle, it is an objective value, independent of people's perception of it. It relates to an objective judgement about one's life, as a good human life. That is not to say anything (directly) about their state of mind; nor is it a judgement that the person making it has any special authority over. By contrast, if someone

says they are happy or unhappy, it is difficult to correct them or to even know better than the person concerned.

3. *Eudaimonia* is not something easily changed. It does not come and go as happiness (usually) does. This is so because it is an evaluation of a life lived well or a person (a good person) as a whole (i.e., considering the life of a person in its totality). Usually, for Aristotle it is evaluated as such, after a stable way of life has been established. This is in agreement with most ancient Greeks' beliefs that *eudaimonia* was to be determined after death (things that take place after death are as important as things that take place during life). See, for example, Homer's discussion of Achilles when visited by Odysseus in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*; see also the portrayal of the main characters of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.

Aristotle insists that *eudaimonia* is not:

a) Pleasure; it cannot be a pleasure because some people go looking for animal pleasures and we are looking for something that is related only to humans;

b) Money and honour; it cannot be money and honour because they can both be used to further some end;

c) Virtue; it cannot be a virtue because virtue is compatible with inactivity, great misfortune, and pain. *Eudaimonia* is the activity of the rational soul, which acts in accordance with virtue; but it is not the virtues themselves because someone can claim to have virtue without having *eudaimonia* (1099a31-b6; 1153b17-19; cf. 1098a16-1102a5).

For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is the only good that can be pursued for its own sake and not as a means to another end. In this way, he believes that *eudaimonia* is a final end without qualification. It is also self-sufficient: it cannot be made more desirable by adding something else to it. If we are to add to it some other good, such as knowledge, for example, it is just to make that other thing part of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is the only self-sufficient good. This actually means that achieving it completely satisfies a human being and with it they will desire nothing else.

Of particular importance for our discussion of *eudaimonia* are books 6 and 10 in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book 10, Aristotle claims that *eudaimonia* needs to have pleasure but not just any pleasure: only the pleasure of doing good is of value for *eudaimonia*. What is truly pleasant is what is pleasant to the good person, and this is a life of virtuous activity, not a life of mere amusement. In Book 6, he considers what kind of reason is relevant to *eudaimonia*: he finds that both practical and theoretical reason are important and necessary for *eudaimonia*. And, while some animals can have practical reason, it is only humans that have theoretical reason. This ability is our share of 'divinity'. *Eudaimonia*, therefore, must

include the excellent activity of theoretical reason, which is philosophy. Theoretical reason is far more important than practical reason (both are needed, but the theoretical form is more important), because:

1. It is the best activity we can have: with it, we contemplate what is best (what is greatest and most divine in the universe), not merely what is best for us (as in practical wisdom).

2. We can engage more continuously in it than anything else, leading to continuous *eudaimonia*.

3. It leads to pure and lasting pleasures. It leads to more leisure for worthy and *eudaimonia* related actions.

4. It is the most self-sufficient activity related to *eudaimonia*.

6. It is related more to what makes us characteristically human and different from animals. Given our nature, it is the most pleasurable thing that we can engage in. We get pleasure through it that we cannot get through anything else.

In the later books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we also see Aristotle claiming that having good friends who are virtuous and engaged in projects related to living a good life, as well as being part of a well-organised *polis* and living harmoniously with others in a society, are also important for *eudaimonia* (even though they are not as important as engaging in activities related to theoretical reason, such as philosophy and mathematics, etc.).

However, in this elaborate Aristotelian system of ethics, we still find problems: a) we do not and can not know the intentions of others, and b) we can not control the character or the moral virtue of others. In this way, we are still morally vulnerable (for example, in the case of a friend who was good, but who has now turned to evil—we are vulnerable and lose our *eudaimonia*). This goes against the criteria of “finality” and “self-sufficiency” that are considered so important for *eudaimonia* (see Cooper 2004, esp. pp.270-308). This problem of moral vulnerability brings out further problems in the Aristotelian theory of virtue and how it is related to his theory of *eudaimonia* (see a relevant discussion of the problem in Nussbaum 2001 (1986), pp.343-372; Pritzl 1983; and DuBois 2014).

Aristotle recognises this vulnerability in the ethics he presents in his *Poetics*, when he discusses tragedy (*Ποιητική* 1449b). Note here that the *Poetics* was relatively unknown in the Mediaeval West, but it was widely known and commented upon in the Eastern Byzantine Empire and possibly studied by Palamas while he was a student at the University of Constantinople. In the definition of tragedy, Aristotle emphasises the use of pity (*ἔλεον* often poorly translated as “pity” here) and fear (*φόβον*) by the poet to produce *catharsis* (*κάθαρση*). These sentiments or passions are

created because, in a tragedy (as a dramatic form of art), the events depicted represent what humans actually feel when confronted with the perils, mysteries, and wonders of life. In other words, we see in Aristotle an understanding that his *eudaimonia* as motivation and impetus for the leading of a moral life is extremely limited and problematic: one needs more to be truly happy. To resolve this Aristotle proposes *catharsis*, which comes through tragedy as an art form mimicking, in superb fashion, the tragedy of life: via *catharsis* we unburden ourselves from the emotional pressure that we feel when we realise that our rational moral system in dealing with the perils, mysteries and wonders of life is flawed (see for a sympathetic to this approach the work of Zeller-Nestle 1988, pp. 259-260, 325-326). Having this valuable knowledge of the Aristotelian discussion of the unavoidable character of tragedy in human affairs (and the limitations of all rationality-based ethical systems) pushes the East into mysticism, asceticism, and hesychasm.

I have dedicated a lot of space to Aristotle's proposals, because of their influence on St Gregory Palamas' early philosophical development (as a student of Theodoros Metochites at the University of Constantinople around 1310). I wish to claim that asceticism and hesychasm, as practiced by St Gregory Palamas and his followers, was not only an attempt to live in a Christian way, observing the traditions of the Orthodox Fathers, but also the result of much thinking on the philosophical problems found in ancient Greek and Aristotelian ethics (I have discussed, in a similar and more specific way, the Stoic, the Epicurean and the Cynic ethical proposals in another work; see Athanasopoulos 2018). Let us examine in more detail some of the problems related to the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*.

a) What is the exact relation of the virtues to *eudaimonia*? Can someone be *eudaimon* without actively engaging in virtuous behaviour? For Aristotle, virtuous activity appears important, but he also insists that *eudaimonia* is not a virtue of any particular kind and one can be virtuous without being *eudaimon*. Some have claimed that virtue is not important or *as important* as activity related to theoretical reason; someone can engage in an activity related to theoretical reason *without* being virtuous. Note, however, that this would cause a serious problem with our motivation for being virtuous (i.e., why be virtuous if one can achieve *eudaimonia* in other ways?). Kraut (1989), following Eastern Byzantine and Western mediaeval commentators, claims that, for Aristotle, in order to engage in theoretical reason we have to have lived a virtuous life and actively pursued virtue. If we have not achieved an active engagement with the virtues, we will not be able to actively engage in theoretical reason for

long (and a necessary requirement for Aristotle is that *eudaimonia* must have duration). But, Aristotle leaves this unclear and also associates *eudaimonia* with the existence of friends, family, and material goods, which are not related to theoretical reason and are not related to virtue as such. Furthermore, all material goods (including friends) can act against *eudaimonia*. Many early Christian philosophers and apologetics (following here the ethical arguments of the Stoics and the Cynics against the Peripatetic School) actually used this as a criticism against Aristotle (Μποζίνης 2017). St Gregory Palamas in relation to this issue would have gained detailed knowledge of the relevant arguments via his teacher Theodoros Metochites, who, as an established teacher of philosophy at the University of Constantinople, would have been an expert in the Byzantine commentaries on Aristotle. As such, St Gregory Palamas would have accepted some of the ethical arguments of the Stoics and the Cynics against Aristotle, agreeing with the Fathers of the Church that virtue does not need any material thing nor friendship to lead one to *eudaimonia* “ἡ ἀρετὴ αὐτάρκης ἐστὶν πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν” (Μποζίνης 2017).

b) How important is recognition from others? Even though there is no dispute that his concept of *eudaimonia* is something objective, how important is recognition (i.e., of one's virtues, good character etc.) by others (a subjective and relativistic factor)? Kraut (ibid) thinks that this recognition is important, both psychologically (one feels good when admired and accepted by others), but also in terms of the objective basis of *eudaimonia*. However, we should note that the above-described problem of moral vulnerability, something Aristotle himself was aware of, makes the necessity of friends a serious problem for Aristotle's theory of *eudaimonia*. Commentators in the East divide from the West here: The hesychastic and ascetic tradition that developed in the East to the point of being the East's predominant form of *anachoretic* monasticism attempted to distance the discussion about true *eudaimonia* from the existence of friends and material goods (see for example the Areopagite texts, the Fathers of the Desert, St John of Sinai and St Symeon the New Theologian). St Gregory Palamas, fully aware of these Aristotelian shortcomings, follows this (Eastern) anachoretic, ascetic and hesychastic tradition, particularly as it was developed in Holy Mt Athos by the Hesychasts residing there (who were Palamas' tutors during his early monastic life) and St Theoleptos of Philadelphia (ca.1250–1322), who was taught about hesychasm by St Nikephoros the Hesychast (13th c.) while he (St Theoleptos) was at Mt Athos.

c) Is *eudaimonia* an ongoing process or an evaluation at the final stage of life (or even a post-mortem evaluation)? Aristotle is not clear on

this. In places, he maintains that being alive is important for *eudaimonia* (because without it we cannot enjoy material goods). In other places, he goes against this (for example, because life pursuits provide obstacles to the full exercise of theoretical reasoning). So Aristotle himself leaves this problem unanswered. Commentators of the East and the West are divided on what could be the best solution for this problem. In the West, there is no clear indication either way (on what is the best interpretation of Aristotle on this issue). On the other hand, most of the Eastern Byzantine commentators claim that the best interpretation (that solves the problem) is that it should take place at the final stage and most concur on a post-mortem evaluation. It is this school of thought within which St Gregory Palamas was educated (by Theodoros Metochites), and this is why he would have considered both the Aristotelian problem and its solution in agreement with the Eastern commentators.

d) Is it related to rest or activity? In both the West and the East commentators are divided on this, and the Aristotelian corpus leaves this quite unclear, intensifying the problems related to *eudaimonia*. But, in the Mediaeval West, most commentators have interpreted Aristotle in an active way in terms of the commission of charitable works (see for example Aquinas' discussion of charity in *Summa Theologiae* in Second Part of the Second Part, Question 23, 'Charity considered in itself', and in First Part of the Second Part, Question 65 'The connection of the virtues'). This continuous active engagement with charitable works becomes constitutive of *eudaimonia* in an attempt to solve the problems associated with it. In the East, *eudaimonia* is related more to a state of well-being and bliss which comes about as the result of an activity (see the above discussion on the relation of virtue to *eudaimonia*). As such, most of the Eastern commentators around the time of Palamas saw a solution to the problems of Aristotelian *eudaimonia* more on the basis of contemplation and prayer, *ascesis* and *hesychia* (which are also the most distant from material goods and the recognition from one's friends).

e) What is the relation of *eudaimonia* to the gods? As indicated above, for most ancient Greeks *eudaimonia* (as a concept, especially when one looks at its etymology), is related to the ancient Greek gods. A person committing *hubris* against the gods would not be *eudaimon*. Up to the fifteenth century, there was unanimity among the commentators (in both the East and the West) that approval by the gods (or, for Christians, by the Christian God) was essential. From the time of the Enlightenment, however, there is very little discussion of this among non-Christian commentators of Aristotle. St Gregory Palamas would have used a Christian approach to Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (understanding it as a

situation where one is always on good terms with God). We have to note here that St Gregory Palamas (of course) would not accept the Aristotelian concept of god: Aristotle's god is motionless and inactive. Self-absorbed in *theoria* (νόησις νοήσεως), there is nothing that this god can do for anyone outside of god itself (Πεντζοπούλου-Βαλαλά 1994, p.135). For St Gregory Palamas, God is Triune and in agreement with the doctrine set out in the Byzantine Orthodox Creed (established and confirmed by the 7 Ecumenical Councils).

f) Inclusive of other elements or not? This problem relates to the tension between the formal and material definitions of *eudaimonia*. In the past, the West emphasised the exercise of theoretical reason (logic and metaphysics) as being most important for *eudaimonia*, to the point that a madman or someone with low mental abilities cannot be *eudaimon*; the East emphasised goodness as being more important (for the ontological, epistemological and ethical reasons behind such an outlook on life, see Athanasopoulos 2004). Currently, the debate is presented in different terms, and even the supporters of goodness (e.g., Kraut who accepts that virtue and good are essential for *eudaimonia*) do not emphasise the connection of goodness and *eudaimonia* to a relationship with God (i.e., one can be *eudaimon* and good without a particular belief in a god). But, as Aristotle showed in his *Politics*, it is extremely difficult to achieve *eudaimonia* in a corrupt *polis*. So, Aristotle, by concluding that all existent (for his time) forms of government are corrupt and by not allowing humans to live with *eudaimonia* outside a *polis*, has made it impossible to achieve *eudaimonia* in its formal and material definition (for consequences of this problem for Aristotle's views on friendship see McCoy 2013). This serious moral and political problem (how to reconcile the view about *eudaimonia* as expressed in the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the view on the *polis* as expressed in Aristotle's *Politics*) was all too evident to the Byzantine commentators and led some of the learned men of the Byzantine Empire (including St Gregory Palamas) to the conclusion that Aristotle's theories about *eudaimonia* were seriously flawed. This realisation nurtured their motivation to seek a Christian ascetic and hesychastic life and distance themselves from Aristotle's ethics.

Overall, as you can see in the above discussion of ancient Greek ethics there was a wider sense in Byzantine times of a disappointment with ancient Greek ethics as a whole and a thirst to find meaning in life that can provide some kind of a *philosophical* salvation. In Homer, we read this thirst as a thirst for glory through heroic acts, but also a realisation that this is not enough. In Plato, we read this thirst as a thirst for knowledge of forms, but also a realisation that, again, this is not enough in terms of

motivation. In Aristotle, we read this as a thirst for *eudaimonia*, but also a realisation that it cannot be reached due to its material definition and its parts that will always be unreachable or unclear in their proportions. But, before we continue with our investigation, we need to examine what we mean by the problem of *philosophical salvation*.

B. What do we mean by the problem of Salvation?

First, one may wonder why a philosopher should even consider salvation (a frequent topic in theological discussions) as a *philosophical* problem. To someone who is not familiar with Greek philosophy, this may seem a plausible question. But, as soon as one looks at the early Greek philosophical texts (Presocratics and/or Platonic), he immediately realises that this question is solely rhetorical in the case of the Greeks. We can consider here Plato (I am not going to discuss the Presocratics -one more obvious choice here- for reasons I mentioned previously). In the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells Cebes and Simias: “I am afraid that other people do not realize that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death” (*Phaedo*, 64a). Similarly, in *Theaetetus* the philosopher lives and sleeps only with his body in the city (*Theaet.* 173e) and what he should strive for is to make an escape from this world of corruption and death by becoming “as like God as possible” (176b). Furthermore, there is an implicit understanding that salvation for Plato involves liberation from the body (*Phaedrus* 246b-249a), which, even though a necessity, is considered corrupting and bad for the soul (*Phaedo* 66b-d; *Rep.* 611b-612a). In the *Republic*, we also have a discussion of the philosopher as saviour (σωτήρ), and Plato does indeed consider it the job of the philosopher to save the city and its people (*Republic* 549a-b; 463a-b; 502c-d; 583b; see some recent discussions on salvation in Plato in Adluri 2013 and Menn 2013).

However, even if for the Greeks this was a philosophical problem, why should more recent philosophers consider it as such? Well, because more recent philosophers *actually do consider* it a problem! See for example here, Santayana and Unamuno, who in their discussion of the tragic and its role in today’s philosophy, outline its role in our (philosophical) contemporary salvation (see Anton 2009). Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Ricoeur have all been discussed in terms of providing paths to philosophical salvation (see Tongeren 2014; King 2005; Charley 2009). More recently, there has been significant discussion of the problem of philosophical salvation and its associated questions in relation to moral luck, the avoidance of birth and death, the choice of longevity, and how

questions explored in ancient Greek tragedy can help us solve, philosophically, the problems of the self (for instance see Williams 1981; Williams 1973; Critchley 2019).

I suggest three main principles in terms of how philosophers see the problem of salvation and its possible solutions: a) one can understand it as providing answers to the mystery of birth and death—in others words, finding a satisfactory metaphysical explanation about the necessity of one's birth and death and their metaphysical nature; b) one can understand this problem as the metaphysical and ethical explanation of why and how one can survive one's death and all the non-human factors that influence one's life; c) finally, one can see this problem as the need to find an answer to the question of why life has value.

In terms of the first principle, we find the ancient Greeks seeking to provide answers through religion and cosmology (support for this can be found in our Homeric discussion above), through philosophy (for this please return to our discussion on Plato and Aristotle) and ancient Greek drama, especially tragedy (see Critchley 2019; Havelock 1982; Jaeger 1986). Here, the Homeric appeared to be better than the other two stages in our exploration: it provided both answers as to why heroes are born and why they die. It also provided answers about what heroes are. In contrast, it fared very low in terms of the second principle: Achilles was not satisfied in death. It also fared very low in terms of the third principle in that a bitter aftertaste is left at the death of the hero. Plato's conception was better in terms of the second principle with a strong realisation that we are born to be good and we will survive death through our knowledge of the forms and our goodness. It fared very low in terms of the first (providing very little guidance as to why I, as a person, am born and then die). It also fared very low in terms of the third, failing to answer why we have human life as a parameter of existence at all. For Plato, life in the body is seen as punishment. But Plato does not provide a satisfactory answer to this question: what kind of value can such a punishment have for the person who lives it (and cannot remember why he has this punishment)? In Aristotle, we find a superb answer to the third principle. The experience of life in its richness and fullness becomes the most important aim in Aristotelian ethics and metaphysics. With *eudaimonia*, Aristotle solved the problem of salvation in terms of why life has value as it is, at the cost of providing answers to the other two: Aristotle cannot provide an answer to the question of why we have life and death, and he cannot provide an answer to the value of life (i.e., why should my life have more value than anyone else's or why have human life at all?) because the human soul for Aristotle is the form of the specific matter that is used to

make the human body and, in this way, this soul is lost at one's death. There was an attempt by Aristotle's followers in Hellenistic and Byzantine times (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and others; see Kessler 2011 and Todd 2014) to support the view that there is some kind of survival of a non-individualised intellectual part of the soul post-mortem (making full use of a relevant remark of Aristotle in *De Anima*, 428b), but it did not succeed in saving Aristotle's theory as such (see, for example, the attack of the late Byzantine commentator Georgios Gemistos or Plethon in Benakis 1974 and my more logical and metaphysical worries in Athanasopoulos 2010). Of course, all these debates offered plenty of useful arguments in proposing a Christian or theistic form of Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages (with examples that can be found among the Arabs, in the Mediaeval West and the Byzantine East). In Aristotle's solution to the problem of salvation, the lack of a soul means that the other two principles are not met: death is annihilation, so why should we live? The Stoics' response to this question came as a necessity in Greek ethics and metaphysics (I will not go into this here, because I must move on; I provide an examination of Stoic and Epicurean ethics contrasted with St Gregory Palamas in Athanasopoulos 2018).

From our investigation so far, it seems that the solution to the philosophical problem of salvation, as outlined above and within the Greek agenda of possible solutions, must have three components:

- a) It must be non-rationalist or at least contain non-rationalist elements (note my discussion above of how associating Kant, Hegel/Hegelians with the Greeks, esp. Homer, is a big mistake).
- b) Metaphysics is connected to and is one with ethics (this has a long history in philosophy: from the early Greek works of Homer and the Presocratics up to now). However, note that ontology and metaphysics cannot provide salvation alone; there is a necessity for appropriate ethics and politics.
- c) Other human discourses and endeavours having to do with *praxis* are relevant and should support the conclusions we need to make (for example, we may need to look beyond metaphysics and ethics, to epistemology and aesthetics to support our conclusions: see our discussion above about the role of *Poetics* in the Aristotelian corpus).

C. Ludwig Wittgenstein on Language/Cultural Games as Forms of Life: Religion and Ethics

At this point, it is useful to see how Ludwig Wittgenstein's views fit within the framework of our discussion and especially our contemporary

understanding of religious discourse, in answer to the question of salvation. We will start with the problem of how one can be certain about the source of salvation: God.

Overall, there has been a major division between the Wittgenstein Fideists (for example, Nielsen in Nielsen and Phillips 2005; Malcolm 1977, 1993) and those opposing them (for example, Philips in Nielsen and Phillips 2005; Martin 1990). Due to the brief nature of my investigation, I will focus here only on some of these debates and try to establish some key points that will become useful in terms of making a comparison with the views of St Gregory Palamas at the next step of my investigation.

In Wittgensteinian scholarship, the debate remains as to whether there is continuity or division between his earlier works (most notably the *Tractatus* and *Notebooks*) and the later ones (most importantly for our purposes, the *Philosophical Investigations*, from here on known as PI, *On Certainty* or OC, and *Culture and Value* or CV). I will begin by outlining what I take to be the strongest points in the discussion of language games in later Wittgenstein and try to gain a deeper understanding of his perspective through a comparison with his early views.

In a perspective like Wittgenstein's, there is a cohesive totality in the understanding of reality upon which belief (including religious belief) is based. He calls this "the system" in OC. In opposition to most empiricists, Wittgenstein believes that "doubt comes after belief" (OC, 160). This is because any kind of testing, confirmation or disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place within a system, i.e., first, you need to have this system and then you can test it. He also believes that this is not an arbitrary starting point: the argument or a question that causes the argument cannot arise without this system and the life of the argument is given by the system (OC, 105). Both justification (of the system and its parts) and testing, at some point, must come to an end (OC, 192, 164). Similarly, he believes that a language game (i.e., a non-rigid rule-based human linguistic interaction, which may take the form of a primitive game, like the builders' discussion with only four words and their combination (see PI, 2), or more advanced like religious or philosophical discourse) is only possible if one has access to this "system" and its beliefs; only if one "trusts something" (OC, 509). This brings us to Wittgenstein's views on the language game being a "form of life". Language is an activity for Wittgenstein that necessitates agreement in practice and use. This constitutes a form of life, where the specific language game under consideration can grow, develop, and mutate, as well as die. Note that this is not a biological form of life, but it shares certain key characteristics with it. For the participant in a specific language game,

there may be other forms of life that can be imagined or may be intelligible, and some discourse in these may be possible, but it is not reliable, neither certain, nor predictable; it cannot have explanatory power, nor can it be accurate (see PI, 19, 23, 241, p.174, 226; Hunter 1968).

This brings us to a famous saying of Wittgenstein: “if the lion could talk we would not understand it” (PI, 223). What are we to make of this? Suppose we know the intentions of the lion, could we understand what the lion says? For Wittgenstein, we would have a negative answer, because these intentions would create further problems, which are similar to the beetle-in-a-box problem that he discusses in PI, 293 (however, note the complexity of Wittgenstein’s argument and the problems with the various interpretations regarding the privacy of these intentions; see Philip 1993 and Mulhall 2006). If we know the syntax and grammatical rules of its language, could we understand it? Again, for Wittgenstein, the answer would be ‘no’, because to know and understand the application of the rules, would mean that one has to already know how to play the language game (these worries have become known as rule-following problems, as outlined primarily by Kripke 1982 and challenged by Wright 1989; McDowell 1984, 1991; Diamond 1991). Some have suggested that the situation might be different if we know the “hinges” upon which the game is played (OC 341, 343, 655). If we know these hinges, which are important rules and facts that are admitted as certain grounds for the linguistic practice and without which we cannot play the game, can we understand the language of the lion? Again Wittgenstein would most likely answer ‘no’. There are many problems here; we do not only have problems regarding the compatibility of the lion’s hinges’ with ours, but we also need to be clear regarding what we take to actually be the hinges and how they are different from intentions and syntactical or grammatical rules (see Orr 1989; Moyal-Sharrock 2013; Pritchard 2017). The issue is further complicated by the acceptance that the lion speaks. If the lion speaks, then surely, we *must* be able to understand it! The careful reader of Wittgenstein would be very hesitant about this; that we recognise a gesture, a movement of the lips or a series of sounds coming out of the mouth of an entity as someone talking does not mean that we also recognise in this our ability to understand this form of communication. Some commentators see, in relation to this, a continuity with Wittgenstein’s earlier views on mysticism (*Tractatus Logicophilosophicus* 7: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”). Wittgenstein’s emphasis on remaining silent (the term often used here is *quietude*) regarding things that we know exist, but that we do not know how we come to understand them as such, in both his early and late

philosophy, have made many commentators characterise him as a mystic. According to Maurice Blanchot (Blanchot 1986, pp.10-11): “Wittgenstein’s ‘mysticism’, aside from his faith in unity, must come from his believing that one *can show* when one *cannot speak*. But without language, nothing can be shown. Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it. Writing (or telling) precedes every phenomenon, every manifestation or show: all appearing”. Indeed, Wittgenstein terms “inexpressible” a large part of what we could consider being non-expressible linguistic conventions that make our language have meaning: “Perhaps what is inexpressible (What I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning” (CV, 16e). Some other philosophers discussing these views of Wittgenstein think that at least some of the ineffable insights as found in aesthetic, religious, and philosophical contexts, are best understood in terms of self-acquaintance, which might be a particular kind of non-propositional knowledge (Jonas 2016). But, if this is so, what kind of epistemic value might this kind of non-propositional knowledge have? How do I know that this non-propositional knowledge can indeed be understood by me if I cannot speak about it? Also, there is an implicit presumption in this approach that I *can* know myself (and know even things that I *cannot* know about myself). Something that Wittgenstein would find rather presumptuous and indefensible (for a similar criticism on Jonas’ work, see Ward 2016).

The proposal of a self-exploratory non-propositional knowledge would be very close to some kind of private language argument (“The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know—to his immediate private sensations. So, another person cannot understand the language” PI par. 243), which Wittgenstein severely criticises in PI (Wittgenstein criticises many aspects of the private language argument in PI: privacy, identity, inner/outer relations, sensations as objects, and sensations as justification for talking about sensation, see PI par. 243-315). I can only briefly mention this here, but I hope I will be able to develop my views on this further in another work. For now, suffice it to say that most of the commentators on Wittgenstein would suggest that he is against the idea that there can exist any discussion or language, which in principle is unintelligible to anyone but its originating speaker (note, however, that commentators disagree on the structure of this argument; see Baker 1998; Canfield 2001, pp.377-9; Stroud 2000).

If you are a philosopher in the analytic tradition and are favourable to Wittgenstein’s intuitions about language and meaning, you would find that the above issues in relation to the lion speaking to us and Wittgenstein’s mysticism (both early and later on) are directly relevant to

the discussion of the communication between humans and God in the work of St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas, which we are going to discuss next. The issue would be similar to the predicament we have with the lion: suppose God was to speak to you. Could you understand Him? On what would you base your understanding? Verbally expressed intentions? In the past, these have produced many historical misreadings that have led people into tragic events, involving death, violence, and pain (a famous recent example from the context of social and political life is ex-American President Bush's direct communications with God; see MacAskill 2005). What about prior textual evidence alone? Again, this is insufficient. Textual evidence alone has led past theologians into various disagreements and heresies, which have also led to death, violence and pain (for example, we can look into the history of Christianity in its first six centuries and the proliferation of Protestant groups in the last four centuries and the violence, death and destruction that "textual evidence" has brought into the world...). Would personal direct experience/communication (something you know you have, but which you cannot describe how you came to have it) fare better? This would be the only plausible candidate (unless you follow the views of someone like Martin 1990, who I am not going to discuss here due to shortage of space; note also that we are not discussing cases of mental abnormality and psychopathology; I discuss this in relation to St Symeon the New Theologian's views later on). Immediately, we can see that a philosopher who is sympathetic to Wittgenstein would find the idea that there could be direct experience and communication (including non-verbal communication) and some sense of certainty in the meaning of this communicative experience attractive; this would be attractive, for the main reason that it would avoid the lack of certainty, "hinge" based criteria and self-exploratory non-propositional knowledge that have attracted criticism and never-ending discussion among Wittgenstein's sympathisers.

However, before we proceed into the investigation of St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas, it is interesting to examine Wittgenstein's views on ethics, because they are of particular interest to the topic of philosophical salvation.

In his early work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and his *Lecture on Ethics*, we find Wittgenstein's most characteristic remarks: In *Tractatus* 6.421, he notes the transcendental and inexpressible nature of ethics and that, in this, ethics and aesthetics are one. By this, he probably means that both ethics and aesthetics are not able to be expressed in propositions (his preferred mode of linguistic expression), and, in this way, they cannot be logically analysed and be part of a logical argument.

This idea is further supported in his *Lecture on Ethics*, where he maintains that the realm of ethics is something that belongs to the supernatural and has nothing to do with facts, which are his primary concern (*Lecture on Ethics*, p.40). This opposition to some earlier views regarding the possibility of moral science and ethics (as able to have some kind of naturalistic and/or scientific aims) is further supported by his later remarks. In *Lectures and Conversations* (par. 18-21), we find Wittgenstein trying to explain what we mean by appreciation (a fundamental aspect of what we do when we morally appraise actions). He notes that something similar takes place when going to a tailor's shop, as we are able to differentiate between: a) people who know about suits and b) people who do not. We immediately recognise them as belonging to one of these two categories, with no further need for explanation and/or questioning. One may feel the need to ask for a further explanation, but Wittgenstein here would be unable to provide any, because, as he would ask, "what kind of an explanation here would satisfy us"?

Note the relevance of our earlier remarks regarding mysticism, the ineffable, and the impossibility of using intentions and private language in all this. We must also note that he is not saying that [ethical] appreciation does not exist, nor that it is difficult to recognise. This positive attitude towards the special nature of moral appraisal is further augmented by a remark in *Culture and Value* where Wittgenstein maintains that ethical teaching cannot simply be reduced to training (*Culture and Value*, p.93). With our short investigation into the work of Wittgenstein, we can see a very concrete example of a philosophical discourse (having to do with ethics and aesthetics), which further supports our discussion regarding the immediate recognizability of our direct experience with God, as proposed by the hesychastic fathers and particularly St Gregory Palamas. Within the philosophical framework of Wittgenstein, one of the key 20th-century British-Austrian philosophers with many followers today, it is possible to have direct experience of God; it is also possible to be certain about it in a direct way, which does not necessitate epistemological justification especially in terms of rational and widely recognizable, non-culture specific ("objective") criteria (for the distinct cultural context of Eastern mysticism as exemplified by St Gregory Palamas see Athanasopoulos 2012).

D. Hesychasm and St Gregory Palamas

Our examination of St Gregory Palamas' views need start with the influence he received from St Symeon the New Theologian and,

especially, the mystical and hesychastic tendencies in his work. St Gregory Palamas not only accepts the views of St Symeon the New Theologian, but develops them further and contextualises them in his debates with Varlaam of Calabria.

But, what do we mean by *hesychia* (ἡσυχία)? *Hesychia* or *hesychasm* (with its derivative *hesychast*) (ἡσυχία - ἡσυχασμός- ἡσυχαστής) is not, and cannot simply be translated as, “stillness”, “rest”, or “quietude” (which are some usual translations of the term in English). This is because, as a concept, it has nothing to do with expressions such as “born still”, “I am resting”, and “you remain quiet”. *Hesychia* is not related to the passivity that these words and expressions indicate. It is more directed to an active and dynamic condition within which the *hesychast* is pursuing a union with God (see for more on this in the Mantzarides paper contained in this collection). Hesychasm, as an approach, relates to a distinct episode in the development of Orthodox monasticism and traces its origins to the early Desert Fathers (note that Professor Mantzarides claims here that there is both biblical and wider patristic support for hesychasm; see his paper in this collection). We have evidence that it was more or less developed in the form we see it today during the tenth to the thirteenth centuries through the works of St Symeon the New Theologian, Nicephoros the Hesychast, St Gregory Palamas and St Gregory of Sinai (their work forms an integral part of the texts of the *Philokalia* which the Palamas Seminar will discuss in detail in 2019-2021). In St Gregory Palamas’ development of *hesychasm*, we find a union of *praxis* (or practical philosophy- *πρακτική φιλοσοφία*) and *theoria* (*θεωρία*), terms that have their philosophical origins in Plato and the Presocratics (see more on this in my Introduction in this collection). With the works of the Desert Fathers, the Cappadocians (in particular St Gregory of Nyssa), and later patristic uses (for example, St Maximus the Confessor) these terms have gained strict and quite rich and complex Christian theological connotations. We have here a dynamic and multifaceted union of asceticism and mysticism, which is unique and distinct from other similar attempts in the history of philosophy or history of religion.

One can see in St Gregory Palamas’ hesychasm an adoption, further development and interplay between two key positions of St Gregory of Nyssa: a) his conviction that true knowledge of God can only be mystical (a position which was adopted by St Symeon the New Theologian in his mystical theology) and b) his insistence that true knowledge of God can only be achieved in stillness (*hesychia*); this position was further developed in St Maximus the Confessor’s endless motion of love (see Chivou 2009; Μουτσούλα 1965; Μπούκη 1970;

Μαντζαρίδη 1963). Taking into consideration this complex and multifaceted nature of the term, it is better to keep it as *hesychia* (transliterated and not translated, i.e., as a technical term). As we shall see, Palamas' attitude on hesychia and asceticism is a result of a) his understanding of the patristic ascetic and mystical treatises on *hesychia* (from St Gregory of Nyssa, St Maximus the Confessor, St Symeon the New Theologian and others) and b) his monastic and spiritual experience as a student and follower of Theoliptos Metropolitan of Philadelphia (c.1250-1322) and Nicephoros the Hesychast (13th c.) who, according to Palamas, codified the method of prayer outlined in St Symeon the New Theologian's *Three Methods of Prayer*. Palamas mentions both Theoliptos and Nicephoros, together with St Symeon the New Theologian in his *Triads* expressing great admiration and highlighting their influence on his ascetic and hesychastic perspective. I will focus here on St Symeon the New Theologian before moving on to St Gregory Palamas.

St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) was a Byzantine Orthodox Christian monk of Constantinople who was one of the three given the name "Theologian" *post-mortem*. The other two were St John, the Disciple and Apostle of Jesus (6-100), and St Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-390, who was Bishop of Nazianzus and Archbishop of Constantinople and a firm supporter of the Nicene Creed: in 381, he led the 3rd Ecumenical Council against Arianism before resigning from the throne of Constantinople and retiring to Nazianzus). St Symeon the New Theologian influenced St Gregory Palamas (together with other mystic Orthodox theologians of the middle and late Byzantine era) in two ways: firstly, by providing a superb way of uniting *praxis* and *theoria*, asceticism and mysticism, in a seamless and dynamically interconnected way (where talking about ascetic struggle is intertwined with mystical experience and mystical vision that confirms the validity of the ascetic existence, see Alfeyev 2000); and secondly, through St Symeon's insistence on the priority of the lived mystical experience as the proper method for knowledge of God (and with *hesychia* as a necessary pre-requisite for this mystical experience). This unique union of asceticism and mysticism went against the position of a significant portion of Byzantine theologians and philosophers and most of their Western mediaeval colleagues.

St Symeon, in the 15th oration of his work *Ethical Orations* entitled "On hesychia and the work (*ἐργασία*) of the one who perseveres with courage in it" (*Sources Chrétiennes* 1967, vol. 129), presents the hesychast (*hesychazon* note that he uses here the present participle of the verb *ἡσυχάζω*) as one of the students of Christ at Mt Tabor, who have witnessed with their own eyes the Transfiguration, the transformation of

the clothing, and the witness of the Father.

The hesychasts (*hesychazontes*) for St Symeon the New Theologian, like the students of Christ on Mt Thabor, recognize the Holy Trinity and the desire to remain within the divine realm, making a solemn determination to cleanse and “make new” their minds (*νοῦς*), soul (*ψυχή*) and body (*σῶμα*; referring to the three tenets mentioned in the relevant part of the gospels), through the cultivation of the virtues and prayer. Proceeding along this line of interpretation of the relevant scriptural passage, he sees the *hesychast* as an exemplification of the Apostles in Pentecost: a) situated in a mystically elevated space, waiting for the reception; b) teaching and interpreting the Gospel; and c) refuting the arguments raised against the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

St Symeon sees the *hesychast* (*hesychazon*) also as an exemplification of Moses: a) going high and within the cloud, hidden from the public; b) seeing not just the back of God, but also the face of God, and also listening and talking to God; c) first approaches the mysteries of God, then the law of God which he delivers to the people, then receiving the light of the light, and being thus, full of light, goes and passes on some of the mercy he has received through his actions to others; d) by asking, he receives, and by receiving he passes on to others, freeing others from the ties of evil and misfortune.

Finally, he suggests that the *hesychazon* is like the other apostles, although he should not be like doubting Thomas. By this, he means that even though the *hesychazon* is locked away from the world, he should be without fear once Christ visits him; his fear and trembling towards God should only be during the reception of the Holy Spirit. The *hesychazon* should touch, with the hands of the mind, the wounds of Christ and through the reception of his senses the mystery of the Resurrected Christ, being always watchful and careful to distinguish between true enlightenment and false or imaginary enlightenment.

St Symeon the New Theologian insists that this continuous check (of how and if the works of the *hesychazon* follow the true and direct experience the hesychast has of God) is by necessity an on-going task and requires the constant care of an experienced spiritual father who will guide and assist when necessary (see for the important role of a spiritual father in St Symeon’s ascetic and hesychastic treatises, the relevant discussions of Taylor 1990; Golitzin 1997, esp. pp.59-60). This need for external supervision on the mystical experiences of the *hesychazontes* is not just because of the limitations of rationality itself (an issue St Symeon discusses often in his writings, attacking early mediaeval scholastic theology for its dependence on the role of reason in approaching God, see

McInnes 2012). There is also the reason of the spiritual dimension of the *praxis* of the hesychast: if there is no such continuous check, then, St Symeon asks, “in what sense and for what exactly reason is the monk keeping himself in the cell”? The mind (*nous*) is immaterial and does not need material confinements to approach the divine. If one thinks that just by keeping oneself secluded he can approach the divine, St Symeon insists, he is deluded: rest and stillness can be turned into an evil, if not placed constantly within the appropriate context of *hesychia*. If the one who is *hesychazon* (or he has the responsibility of overseeing the progress of the ones who are *hesychazontes*), does not follow this path of continuous examination, he does not know the path he walks on and leads himself and others into destruction and eternal fire. St Symeon, using his long monastic experience, warns that the one who teaches *hesychazontes* to follow an unexamined path is a liar and a deceiver, leading others and himself into destruction and eternal damnation.

St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) further develops this profound way of uniting *praxis* and *theoria* (asceticism and mysticism) in a seamless and dynamically interconnected way with his defence of hesychasm against the attacks of Varlaam of Calabria (1290-1348). He finds that the key to this defence is to acknowledge the role of the body in the process of purification. The soul, the mind and the body become one in this process and any kind of dualism is rendered obsolete. In his *Triads* (“Defence of the Hesychasts”, Question 1, Answer 2; see Χρήστου 1962, vol. 2, p.120), he maintains that the *hesychazontes* (notice here the influence of St Symeon the New Theologian even on the use of the exact form of the term) need to gather their self and primarily their thoughts within their body and in particular the body within their body, which the hesychasts call the “heart” (τῷ ἐν τῷ σώματι ἐνδοτάτῳ σώματι, ὃ καρδίαν ὀνομάζομεν). For Palamas, a certain way of achieving this gathering and focusing of thoughts is to check thoroughly all parts of one’s soul and one’s mind, so that nothing is hidden in one’s heart (μὴ ψυχῆς μέρος, μὴ μέλος σώματος ἀνεπίσκοπον ἑάσης). St Gregory Palamas insists that it is only with this constant striving in the focusing and gathering of thoughts that the cleansing process of all human faculties and ceaseless praying of the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ save me, a sinner” or *Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Ὡὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐλέησόν με τον ἁμαρτωλόν*) in one’s heart can be achieved. Fasting and *ascesis* here become worthless unless put into the service of mystical union with God. Going into the metaphysics of this process, he insists that the energy of prayer cannot be concentrated and become appealing to God unless the mind’s and soul’s energies are first focused and concentrated in the heart (Χρήστου 1962, vol. 2, pp.121-134).

There is a need to transform the body into a place, where God's presence and the energy of the Holy Spirit can dwell (*ἡ σὰρξ μετασκευαζομένη συναννυοῦται τε καὶ συναπολαύει τῆς θείας κοινωνίας καὶ κτῆμα καὶ αὐτὴ γίνεται καὶ οἶκημα Θεοῦ* -Χρήστου 1962, vol. 2, pp.138-140).

This is where he finds Varlaam's accusation against the hesychasts (basically that they are *omfalopsychous* or *ὀμφαλοψύχους*, i.e., that they try to concentrate their souls in their navels), is a wrong interpretation of what hesychasm is all about and far from the true aims of the *hesychastic* pursuits. The heart (esp. what St Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts call "heart") is not related to a specific area in the material body and most certainly it is not the navel. The concentration that St Gregory Palamas and the hesychasts talk about is not in any part of the body *as it is*, but it is focused on the *transformed body* that is called "*the heart*". Palamas sees in Varlaam's poor attempt to criticise the hesychastic practice a blatant disregard of both the history and the development of hesychastic practice (Palamas discusses in his treatise the details of how Theoliptos of Philadelphia and Nicephoros the Hesychast influenced this development; see Χρήστου 1962, vol. 2, pp.141-143). Following this line of thinking, the Declaration of the monks of Holy Mt Athos (*Αγιορειτικὸς Τόμος*), St Gregory Palamas affirms this need for a transformation of the body, so that it can unite with the soul and the mind; he insists that only through this transformation can the body lose the animosity of the flesh towards the soul that was accepted by ancient Greek metaphysics, scholastic interpretations of Aristotle and Varlaam's (and his followers) approach to salvation (*ἡ σὰρξ μετασκευαζομένη συναννυοῦται τε καὶ συναπολαύει τῆς θείας κοινωνίας καὶ κτῆμα καὶ αὐτὴ γίνεται καὶ οἶκημα Θεοῦ, μηκέτ' ἐνοικουροῦσαν ἔχουσα τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν ἔχθραν, μηδὲ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ἐπιθυμοῦσα*).

There is an epistemological certainty in the Declaration in the claims made about the process that St Gregory Palamas depicts: the Fathers of Holy Mt Athos stress in their Declaration that they have spoken themselves to the saints who managed to unite with God and who got their bodies transformed via the energies they received from God. As such, they (the monastic community) can indeed be certain that the hesychast fathers have indeed seen God. It is this epistemological certainty that makes Varlaam's sceptical epistemological, metaphysical and ethical attacks on the hesychasts the product of delusion and an intellectual and mental disease (*τύφος*): *Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων ἔστιν οἷς αὐτοπροσώπως ὠμίλησαμεν καὶ διδασκάλοις ἐχρησάμεθα. Πῶς οὖν, τούτους παρ' οὐδὲν θέμενοι, τοὺς καὶ πείρα καὶ χάριτι δεδιδαγμένους, τοῖς ἀπὸ τύφου καὶ λογομαχίας ἐπὶ τὸ διδάσκειν χωρήσασιν εἴζομεν; Οὐκ ἔσται τοῦτο, οὐκ*

ἔσται (Χρήστου 1962, vol. 2, p.144).

Conclusions

From the above examination, we can see that the language of hesychasm (as developed by the Cappadocian and Eastern Mystical Fathers, like St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas) has a life of its own. It has very little to do with other linguistic forms of life (such as the language of mediaeval Scholasticism). Attempts to find similarities between key hesychastic figures and the masters of mediaeval Scholasticism have been many, both in the past and more recently. Such attempts, however, have been and are liable to failure due to the dual aims and dependency of hesychasm on both *praxis* and *theoptia*, mysticism and asceticism. To flourish and reach its aims, hesychasm needs discipline and obedience to a spiritual father who can discern true progress or regression in the development of the hesychast novice. A continuous return to the heart (which for the hesychasts is not located in a particular part of the body) and examination of the innermost thoughts should also be a neverending process. The language used to describe this process was born in the work of the early Fathers of the Desert and came to maturity in the works of St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas. It continues to grow and develop for as long as there are hesychasts (some unknown to the many, still living in remote caves of Holy Mt Athos and other hesychastic centres of Eastern monasticism). It is very difficult to know or sense the unique character of hesychasm for researchers outside the tradition within which it flourishes. But it can be recognised and sensed fully within the tradition that has produced it. This way of understanding Eastern hesychastic mysticism and asceticism and its goals in (philosophical and theological) salvation is relevant and useful to philosophical research into salvation and philosophical approaches to communicating with God (especially to researchers influenced by Wittgenstein).

In our investigation, we found that both discussions regarding the problems found in the ancient Greek agenda on the need of ontological salvation and contemporary philosophical (metaphysical, epistemological, ethical) debates regarding the ineffable, meaning intentions and hinges (as mentioned in the work of Wittgenstein) point to the greatness of the solutions provided in the work of Palamas. Without hesychasm, our culture would be greatly impoverished. It would most probably deny itself a very plausible approach to salvation; one that is achieved by heroically confronting one's weaknesses and limitations; one that is recognising the

need for the dependence on God who cannot be rationally understood and whose existence is beyond the bounds of modern science and its myopic insistence on comprehensibility, predictability, and testability. We need to be mindful of the weakness of science in relation to God, especially now that science is all powerful and permeates all aspects of our social behaviour. In relation to this, it is by no accident that Wittgenstein attacked scientism and noted that over-reliance on science puts philosophy and our cognitive powers to sleep (“Man has to awaken to wonder. . . . Science is a way of sending him to sleep again”; see Wittgenstein 1980, p. 5; Beale and Kidd, 2017).

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5. THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING IN ECKHART, PALAMAS, AND WITTGENSTEIN: DISCUSSION OF AREOPAGITIC INEFFABILITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR WESTERN AND EASTERN MYSTICISM

DR. CONSTANTINOS ATHANASOPOULOS

Abstract: Both Eckhart and Palamas use the ineffability of God, as described by the Areopagitic “Cloud of Unknowing” (γνῶφος ἀγνωσίας), in their mystical philosophy and theology. This has specific epistemological, metaphysical-ontological, and ethical implications. I wish to claim that their use of ineffability differs considerably from the use of this term in contemporary analytical discourse about the Unknown God (Hick 2000). Using some of the intuitions found in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*, I embark on an investigation of the following questions: a) do the accounts of ineffability that Meister Eckhart and St Gregory Palamas provide in their works match the Areopagitic account of the Cloud of Unknowing? b) Is the account of Meister Eckhart compatible with the one offered by St Gregory Palamas? c) Can we use our contemporary philosophical and theological discourse to describe the differences? d) Which account is preferable to help us understand the Cloud of Unknowing within the Corpus Areopagiticum and its meaning as a distinct mode of life and a method for a distinct philosophical/theological enquiry?

Keywords: Cloud of Unknowing, mysticism, Eckhart, Palamas, Wittgenstein, Hick.

A. Eckhart as a Mystical Philosopher and Theologian and the Cloud of Unknowing

Meister Eckhart (Eckhart von Hochheim OP, c.1260-c.1328), is probably one of the most influential European mediaeval mystical philosophers and theologians. But what is it to be a mystical philosopher and theologian? In the philosophical area that is known as philosophy of religion, there is much discussion about mysticism. Mysticism draws its etymology from the ancient Greek word *μυέω-μυῶ* (myeo-myo), which means to teach or guide someone. As a term it originated in the practices of the ancient Greek religious mystics (especially the festivities of the Dionysian and Eleusinian Mysteries and the cults of Orpheus, Persephone and Demeter), who guided the novices with eyes half-closed (or tied) through the corridors of the temples, teaching them and guiding them so that they could achieve the inner knowledge of ancient Greek religion, in the form of ancient Greek myths. The mystics had to decipher the meaning of these myths and understand the communications they received from their gods through the use of oracles (see Cosmopoulos 2003).

There have been many studies of mysticism over the centuries and proliferation of religions that have shown mystical tendencies (for significant philosophical studies after the classic work of Underhill 1945, see Gellman 2001; Wainwright 1981; Forman 1999; Katz 1978; Katz 2013; Pike 1992; Sells 1994; Stace 1961; for psychological/biological studies after the classic work of James 1917, see d'Aquili and Newberg 1999). Examples of mysticism we can find in Hinduism, Buddhism, Egyptian religion, Judaism, Islam, and other religions in East and West (Shamanism, Animism, and Druidic religions in Europe and the British Isles, etc.). I will focus on what comes next in Christian mysticism (again, there are many studies, indicatively here I refer to Fanning 2001; Cupitt 1998; Turner 1996). Both in the East and the West, commentators on the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists especially, have dedicated many books to the study of aspects of mysticism found in most ancient Greek philosophy.

In the early development of Christianity, a significant mystical movement (Gnosticism) was isolated and declared a heresy (although it remained in a concealed form and still exists in some way today in Theosophy, the Sophiologists, Freemasons and Swedenborgians, New Age cults and religious movements; see King 1864; DeConick 2016; Dibb 2005; Grimstad 2002; van den Broek and Hanegraaff 1998; Hanegraaff 1998). Later, Christian mysticism saw a revival in the East with the writings of the Desert Fathers and the Areopagitic writings, which were

widely circulated in Eastern monasteries and centres of learning and philosophy, including the University of Constantinople, from as early as the sixth century (Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin, 1994; Coakley and Stang, 2009; Rorem, 1993; Klitenic and Dillon, 2007). In the West, the Areopagitic texts were translated by Hilduin (c. 785 – c. 855), Bishop of Paris, who received a manuscript at his monastery of Saint Denys, and Johannes Scotus Eriugena (815-877) who knew about them from his time in Irish monasteries and produced a widely known and used translation in middle and later medieval times. Note that these mystical Christian texts (esp. those of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*) were widely circulated in the Byzantine Empire even before Hilduin started translating them. Monks from Ireland, other areas of Europe, and the British Isles who visited monasteries in Middle East and Egypt during the late seventh century found some of them, made copies, and brought these copies to their monasteries for further study and copying. In 827 the Byzantine Emperor Michael II donated a major part of these manuscripts to Louis the Pious, the son of Charlemagne in their correct version (see Schmidt-Biggemann 2005, p.245). In this way, Hilduin and Johannes Scotus Eriugena, when they started their onerous task of translating these texts, had at their disposal correct texts and possibly even commentaries (Rorem, 2008). In mediaeval philosophy, there are many examples of famous Christian mystics in both continental Europe and the British Isles who were influenced by these texts; I would like to mention here Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), and a significant school known as the Victorines (see Fanning 2001). In the British Isles, Richard Rolle (1300-1349), Walter Hilton (1340-1396) who was the author of the text entitled “The Cloud of Unknowing” (a title taken from a translation of a Greek term “*γνῶσις ἀγνωσίας*” found in the Areopagitic texts), Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), and Margery Kempe (1373-1438) were all famous mystics who were influenced by these texts (see Miller 1996). The mediaeval mystics of the West combined their learning of Aristotle with the Areopagitic texts and certain Neoplatonic texts written by Plotinus (c.204/5-270), Proclus (412-485) and Damascius (458-550), which had gnostic tendencies. These Neoplatonic texts, even though widely studied and commented upon in the East up to the Fall of Constantinople (see for example the influence they had on the Neoplatonist Byzantine philosopher Georgios Gemistos or Pletho, 1355-1452), did not influence the major part of Orthodox theologians and philosophers, who tried to disassociate their preferred texts from Gnostic influences and remain faithful to the Areopagitic texts (which in their original and correct versions had no gnostic tendencies).

However, it is significant to note that famous European early Renaissance mystical theologians and philosophers (like Nicholas of Cuza, 1401-1464), were influenced by the later stages of mystical Neoplatonist learning that Georgios Gemistos brought to Italy with him from the East during his journey to Ferrara as part of the Constantinople delegation for discussions with the papal delegates (Council of Ferrara/Florence 1431-1449). Georgios Gemistos convinced Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) to create a house of Neoplatonist learning in Italy (the Neoplatonic Florentine Academy). Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the famous Renaissance humanist Roman Catholic priest, who led the Florentine Academy in its later stages, was the product of this amalgamation of Western and Eastern Neoplatonist mystical schools of thought in Italy (Field, 1988; Allen, Rees, Davies, 2002). We examine below the way that Meister Eckhart, a key European mediaeval mystical philosopher and theologian, developed some Neoplatonic ideas in his work, comparing and contrasting his views with those of St Gregory Palamas and with those of a much later discussion on the ineffability of God in philosophy and theology.

Meister Eckhart, in *Sermon V* ('The Self-Communication of God'; see Meister Eckhart 1909, pp.34-35), claims that the human soul has two capacities: with the first (intelligence), the soul comprehends the Holy Trinity and becomes one with what is understood and comprehended. With the second (will), it plunges into the Unknown. He describes this capacity of the will as an essential characteristic and a noble one, noting that it forces thought and all the powers of the soul into following it in this union with the Unknown.

In *Sermon VI* ('On Sanctification'), after noting that sanctification is beyond love, humility, and pity (because the Holy cannot be moved out of itself and humility consists in the annihilation of oneself), he cites Boethius ("Men, why seek ye outside you what is inside you -salvation?") and Avicenna ("The spirit which is truly sanctified attains to so lofty a degree that all which it sees is real, all which it desires is granted, and in all which it commands, it is obeyed") to conclude: "When the free spirit is established in true sanctification, it draws God to itself, and were it placed beyond the reach of contingencies, it would assume the properties of God. But God cannot part with those to anyone; all that He can do for the sanctified spirit is to impart Himself to it" (Eckhart 1909, pp.46-47). Eckhart considers the prayer of the sanctified as a prayer for nothing because it has no desire for anything and it contains nothing that it wishes to be freed from. It loses its own distinctiveness and vanishes in God (Eckhart 1909, p.49). And, to the question of who can be sanctified in this way, he responds: "No one who now lives" (Eckhart 1909, p.53).

The above-mentioned positions echo similar views expressed by Eckhart throughout his *Sermons* and other works. Famous positions that agree and throw light on the above passages include “the perfection of beatitude lies in both: Knowledge and love” (*Serm.* 6.1-4, 30.1-2, 40.1-3, 47.2-3) and his Indistinguishability Thesis: “God is indistinct, and the soul loves to be indistinguished, that is, to be and to become one with God” (*In Sap.* n.282; Meister Eckhart 1986, p.172). This last thesis (the Indistinguishability Thesis) formulated in the *inquantum* principle (in Meister Eckhart’s words: “the words ‘insofar as’ [*inquantum*], that is, a reduplication, exclude from the term in question everything that is other or foreign to it according to reason”) and his peculiar version of Thomistic Trinitarian nondualism were sufficient to condemn him in the eyes of his judges at Avignon and resulted in the bull of condemnation issued by John XXII in 1329 (see “Documents Relating to Eckhart’s Condemnation”, in Meister Eckhart 1981, p.72, and McGinn 1987, pp.7-24). Hidden in the Indistinguishability Thesis lies the danger of rendering the personal existence of the believer indistinguishable from the existence of God through their mystical union. And, hidden in his peculiar trinitarian nondualism lies the danger of having the Holy Spirit transformed into a simple relation of love between the Father and the Son. It is these positions that have allowed Smith to claim that Meister Eckhart was a mediaeval gnostic (Smith 2008) and Carter to compare Eckhart’s positions to Zen Buddhism (and specifically Nishida; see Carter 2009, pp.1-21).

From the above discussion, it is evident that Meister Eckhart considers the “Unknown” or “Ineffability” of God as important and crucial to one’s mystical union with God. What I plan to investigate further here is how Meister Eckhart’s particular positions in relation to this ineffability of God fits within recent debates on ineffability and the Corpus Areopagiticum.

B. Hick on the Unknowability or Ineffability of God

The Ineffability of God (as our difficulty in being able to express what is God in words) and how best to interpret specific passages in the Corpus Areopagiticum where we see this being discussed are topics of an ongoing debate that has been rekindled recently and engages three basic questions: A) are the names of God mere metaphors? B) Therefore, are the names of God negated by the very essence of God? C) Is the negation of the names of God how humans can return to and unite with God? According to Timothy D. Knepper, Hick and other contemporary comparative theologians, who have approached the Corpus Areopagiticum

with the sole purpose of finding in it some common and transferable conceptual and methodological tools, commit interpretative mistakes in terms of these three basic questions (Knepper 2009, pp.205-221). I would like to point out from the start that the issue is not merely an interpretational one. If the issue of the Ineffability of God was restricted to how best we can interpret specific passages in the Corpus Areopagiticum, it would have only a technical and terminological significance. However, this is not the case. The Corpus Areopagiticum has been widely used by Christian mystics from the time of St Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662) on: in the West, it was used widely among mystical theologians particularly after the translation of key texts from the Corpus Areopagiticum by Johannes Scotus Eurigena at the request of King Charles the Bald, (823-877). In the Byzantine East, it was met with significantly more enthusiasm much earlier and it was used systematically and commented upon (together with St Maximus the Confessor's writings) from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries. It was used in the 6th (680-692), the 7th (787), the 8th (879-880) and the 9th (1341-1351) Ecumenical Council (with the 9th accepting the *Hagiorite Tome*, which declared the true dogmatic nature of St Gregory Palamas' positions; Geanakoplos 1969, pp.150-163; Athanasopoulos 2004, pp.319-341). I wish to stress that the issues related to the Ineffability of God are key questions in understanding contemporary differences in the conception of God in the Christian West and the Christian East (you can find a more detailed examination of these differences in Athanasopoulos 2013).

One can see how important these texts are for the differentiation of the Western approach to Ineffability from the Eastern one by referring briefly to Hick's position. Hick maintains that one can find the idea that the language of scripture is (and can only be) metaphorical in the Areopagitic texts. For Hick, biblical language is literally absurd, and "the function of this metaphorical language is to draw us onwards in our spiritual journey" (Hick 2000, p.39). He actually draws a parallel here with the Buddhist idea of *upaya* (skilful means) claiming that in both Buddhist and Areopagitic texts "religious teachings are not eternal truths but are ideas adapted to our present state in order to lead us towards enlightenment, and they are to be left behind when they have served their purpose" (Hick 2000, p.39). In his reply to Knepper, Hick does not deny that his paper can be interpreted in the way that Knepper interpreted it, but adds that in his (Hick's) paper, his interest lies not in the nature and use of Divine Names in the Corpus Areopagiticum, but rather in the way that the Areopagitic texts refer to the use of biblical language (Hick 2009, p.224).

Judging Hick's response to Knepper, we cannot but find it inadequate. What is the source of the Divine Names, if not the biblical language? We use the Bible to find the names of God: the three persons of the Holy Trinity; as such, any response of the kind that Hick is envisaging is inadequate and is an attempt to shift us off track from an appropriate interpretation of the Areopagitic texts. I will not continue examining the claims of Hick and Knepper, because I disagree with both in their approach. I only wish to use Hick's views as a tool to decipher possible misinterpretations of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* on the Ineffability of God and highlight how his view can be used to provide a more recent example of Meister Eckhart's (misguided) Indistinguishability Thesis. Hick writes:

"The next step was taken centuries later by Meister Eckhart, when he identified the object of Christian worship and devotion as God in distinction from the ineffable Godhead. 'God and the Godhead', he says, 'are as different from one another as heaven and earth ... God acts. The Godhead does not'. He even took the next, even more daring, step of recognizing that because the worshipped God is partly a human construction, he (or she) exists only in relation to the worshipping community. Thus 'before there were creatures', he says, 'God was not god, but, rather, he was what he was. When creatures came to be and took on creaturely being, then God was no longer God as he is in himself, but God as he is with creatures'. He thus, points to the idea that the God of the Bible and of the religious life is a manifestation in human terms of the ultimate divine reality, and that as manifest He (for he was nearly always spoken of as male) exists only in relation to his worshippers" (Hick 2000, pp.39-40).

This then is the reason and ultimate justification for Eckhart's Indistinguishability Thesis; without it, we cannot be certain that we could unite with God as the ultimate divine reality, but we can only unite with God in one of His manifestations through biblical language (which for Hick, both in the Areopagitic texts and in Eckhart, can only be metaphorical). Hick sees in Meister Eckhart's Indistinguishability Thesis a way to guarantee a union with God (without following the Gnostic and/or the Theosophical path). He also thinks that this can be done if one admits that the biblical language used to describe God can only be metaphorical. Should we accept this? Do we have other options available to avoid the ploys of the Gnostics? Do we have to accept Hick's and Meister Eckhart's mystical approach, or have we other options that do not go against the formulations of Christian dogma developed through the ecumenical councils (which do not accept a metaphorical use of Christian language about God)? We can look at the texts of St Gregory Palamas for answers to these questions.

C. St Gregory Palamas and the Incomprehensibility of God

St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) in his “Triads for the Defence of those who Practice Sacred Quietude” (in his first reply to the first question; Αγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμά 1982, σελ. 68) states the following: “Ὁ καὶ ὁ τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱεραρχίας ὑποφῆτης Διονύσιος κατ’ αὐτὴν ἀπεφάνητο σαφῶς· «ἡ γὰρ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀφομοίωσίς τε καὶ ἔνωσις, ὡς τὰ θεῖα», φησί, «διδάσκει λόγια, ταῖς τῶν σεβασμιωτάτων ἐντολῶν ἀγαπήσῃ καὶ ἱερουργίας μόνως τελεῖται»”. In translation, this means: “The writer of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* [part of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*] Dionysios states clearly that the union with God, as it is mentioned in the heavenly inspired words, can only be achieved by the ones who love the most respected orders [commands on how to live as found in the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles] and the Mysteries of the Church”. Directly prior to this text, St Gregory stresses that “only the purest will see God”; by this, he means that only those who try to keep the commandments and live in prayer will achieve sufficient purity of heart to see God. Human knowledge, though not disregarded, is very limited in this regard and does not allow for one to achieve perfection. Immediately after the above-cited text, St Gregory stresses that it is only St John the Baptist, who is above all other prophets; St John the Baptist lived as a hermit without comfort and without being educated in the sciences and philosophy.

Further on in the response to this question, St Gregory Palamas differentiates between two kinds of knowledge (or wisdom) of God: a) the knowledge of God that God has for Himself (humans can only get a glimpse of this through divine energy and grace in this world) and b) the knowledge of God that the “true philosophers” (οἱ ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες) can achieve by investigating the origins (αἰτίαν or cause) of things and living life according to the gospels and through the mysteries of the Church (by the way, this emphasis on “true philosophers” and “true philosophy” is not new in Greek philosophy; see for an important parallel Plato’s *Pheado* 64a-d and *Πλάτωνος Επιστολή Ζ*, 326a-c). Note that St Gregory Palamas here considers this (the second) form of knowledge inferior and alien to the true knowledge and wisdom of God that can only be achieved by the pure in heart and through divine energy and grace. Note also that both of these forms of knowledge of God have nothing to do with the way idol worshippers and non-believers understand and investigate the origins of things in this world. They are not “true philosophers” and, thus, they are doomed to error and darkness in their minds. Further on he clearly differentiates between what is true wisdom

and can be found in the Gospel and other divinely inspired scriptures, and what is fake or “make-believe” (*δοκοῦσα*), which is not only wrong and erroneous but also makes people who believe in it stupid (*μωραίνουσα*; see *Αγ. Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ* 1982, pp.114-115).

For St Gregory Palamas and the Hesychasts union with God for the Saints is real and this real relation is not mimicking the relation of anything that can be found in nature. As the Holy Fathers of the Hagioreite Tomos (1340) insist any attempt to make the mystery of the union with God relate and be similar to anything that can be found in the natural world is committing the heresy of the Messalians. Messalians (their name means in Syrian “the one who prays”) or Adelphians (Adelphus was the name of their leader), or Euchites (this name in Greek means “the one who prays”) or Enthusiasts or Corentes (they were called this because they were agitated frequently by what they thought was the presence of the Holy Spirit) were a movement of laymen and monks that preached various Manichaean positions including the idea that everyone was born with a demon which was inherited from his parents and that baptism cut out all other sources and forms of sin but could not liberate us from this demon. They avoided all manual labour and believed that only through constant prayer (and what they termed “mortification”, which lasted usually for three years) we can liberate ourselves from this demon. Once liberated from this demon, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us and no further effort is needed in this life, becoming saved through the Holy Spirit while alive, and thus not needing any further fasts, askesis or prayer. In their beliefs, men cannot attain perfection on their own, but they can become equal to God in virtue and knowledge, seeing the past and future and the hearts of men, and seeing the essence (*οὐσία*) of Holy Trinity with their bodily eyes. This movement was condemned as a heresy in 383 but spread from Mesopotamia and Middle East to Europe and continued its existence in many forms till around the 12th c. when it was condemned again as a heresy at the Council of Trier (1231). According to St John the Damascene and other Holy Fathers Messalians were accused of promoting some form of mystical materialism, where matter and the flesh acquires a mystical dimension in the union with God (for more details see Stewart 1991). Mystical Materialism as a philosophical and theological theory has a long history. One could say that the ancient followers of Democritus (c.460 BC–c.370 BC) were Mystical Materialists, in the sense that all things were material (including the soul) and they were composed of small particles of matter (the atom) that cannot be observed nor sensed by our senses but they control our lives and the way the material world unfolds (see Vlastos, 1945–1946). Newer versions of Mystical Materialists include neuropsychedia

researchers and mystical materialists in the philosophy of mind (Langlitz, 2013; McGinn 2000) and New Age movements that are particularly interested in New Animism and Environmentalism (see for example the work of Hayden, 1996).

The accusation that someone is committing the heresy of Messalians by the Holy Fathers of Mt Athos is not to be taken lightheartedly. In their Hagioreite Tomos they outline the errors of the followers of Varlaam of Calabria “Ὅς τις μόνῃ τῇ μιμήσει τε καὶ σχέσει, χωρὶς τῆς θεοποιῦ χάριτος τοῦ Πνεύματος, τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν τελείαν ἔνωσιν ἀποφαίνεται τελεῖσθαι ... καὶ τὴν θεοποιὸν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔξιν τῆς λογικῆς φύσεως διὰ μόνῃς μιμήσεως προσγινομένην, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔλλαμπιν ὑπερφυᾶ καὶ ἀπόρρητον καὶ θείαν ἐνέργειαν, ὁρωμένην ἀοράτως τοῖς ἡξιωμένοις καὶ νοουμένην ἀπερινοήτως, οὗτος ἴστω τῇ τῶν μασσαλιανῶν, ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν, ἀπάτη περιπεσών.” (Χρήστου 1966, p.570). In this text, they insist that one cannot claim that a human can come close to God through some kind of imitation or relation, without the grace from the Holy Spirit, and that the union that St Gregory Palamas and the other Hesychast Fathers talk about is real, mystical and can only be achieved through the mystical and unnatural divine energy, which is seen in an invisible way by those that are deemed worthy by God to see who also understand it in an incomprehensible way. In this text, they use both Areopagetic texts and texts from St Maximus the Confessor (a Holy Father who wrote extensively against the Messalians) to insist that any attempt to make this union with God describable in natural terms or on the basis of humans knowing the essence of God is wrong and dangerous and makes God and creation one, which is the basis of the heresy of Messalians.

From the above, we can understand better the mystical move of St Gregory Palamas: what he wishes to stress in relation to the Incomprehensibility of God is that this does not imply that we cannot know God (where God is the ultimate Unknown). God *is* incomprehensible to us because the Trinity is beyond our limited understanding (in this he differentiates himself from key positions of the Messalians). But this does not mean that God is unknowable or ineffable to the saints. Knowledge of God is possible for the pure of heart, through never-ceasing prayer and askesis, the mysteries of the Church, and through divine grace and energies.

As such, there is no need for Meister Eckhart’s Indistinguishability Thesis. We do not need to be indistinguishable, as God is indistinguishable. All we need to do is to be pure of heart and participate fully in the mysteries of the Church, in a never-ending spirit of askesis, compunction, and prayer, so as to be able to attract divine grace and energies. In his

Oration on the Sacred Light (*Περί Φωτός Ιεροῦ*), St Gregory Palamas stresses that the students of Jesus saw Him in His true nature through His radiant garments on Mt Thabor. This light was a sensible light, i.e., light perceived through the senses (*αἰσθητόν*), but it also symbolised Jesus' nature as God; it was a divine light visible to the human eye (but note that he also insists that what the disciples saw is not God's essence, only His energies). This means that the students of Jesus united with Him for this brief moment in their vision of His divine nature via His divine energies. For St Gregory Palamas, this is possible also for the saints throughout the history of the Church because they are able to see (and know) God directly and in this world, uniting with Him according to their powers and the divine energies that the Triune God bestows upon them and for as long as their limited powers and human nature make it possible (Ἀγ. Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ 1982, pp.411-567). This position is not a novel understanding of the union with God, but it is in the Church tradition and theology long time before St Gregory Palamas had to use it to defend the Hesychasts. For example, look at the Church hymn or *Apolytikion* for the Feast of Transfiguration (which St Gregory Palamas uses frequently in his work): “*Μετεμορφώθης ἐν τῷ ὄρει Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, δείξας τοῖς Μαθηταῖς σου τὴν δόξαν σου, καθὼς ἠδύναντο...*”. Note that there is implicit here an askesis and humility that is essential for the mystical theology of the East. According to the Holy Fathers, there is a mystical humility that has to guide physical pain and toil during askesis; Abba Dorotheos calls it the mystical humility that makes you believe that you are below all Creation; we come to believe that we are the weakest in Creation and we leave all to God; it is this mystical intuition, that goes beyond what you can see with your physical eyes and makes you do the necessary physical labour and restrain your flesh during askesis with knowledge (*με ἐπίγνωσιν*), avoiding pride and excessive efforts and allowing your soul to develop and God's grace to dwell within you (Αββᾶ Δωροθέου 2000, Πημ. §202, 36; Επ. Ε', §190, 18).

It is also important to stress that the incomprehensibility of God (which St Gregory Palamas allows) is not (and cannot be) based on a metaphorical reading of biblical language. Both in the content of his texts and in his overall approach, St Gregory Palamas never doubted the literal truth and meaning of the biblical language that he used to prove his theological points. He also stresses that all the Fathers of the Church (the author of the Areopagitic texts included) who are cited in his works believe in the literal truth of the meaning of the Gospels and the other texts in the Bible that they discuss. Far from being syncretic or comparativist, he makes it clear that there is only one truth and this truth is in the Gospel

and the other divinely inspired writings that the Orthodox Church adopts as canonical scripture. For St Gregory Palamas, there is nothing metaphorical in scripture. This would allow knowledge as “make-believe”, or fake knowledge, to cloud the minds of believers who read it and it would lead them away from God, rather than into a true union with Him. If St Gregory Palamas allowed himself to admit that there can be any metaphorical sense in scripture it would bring him close to the Messalian heresy that both he and the Holy Fathers of Mt Athos in their Hagioreite Tomos condemn.

Are the reasons for rejecting the claims made by Meister Eckhart and Hick solely theological? To answer this, we look at some of the ideas put forward by Wittgenstein.

D. Wittgensteinian Hinges and Orthodox Mysticism

For many, Wittgenstein (Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1889-1951) is by far the most dangerous sceptic of the twentieth century. It is not only that his lectures and works inspired some of the most fierce contemporary sceptics (most notably Paul Feyerabend, 1924-1999, who asked to be called a “Neo-Pyrrhonian” Sceptic; see Athanasopoulos 1994), it is also that his views place serious doubts on the certainty of key philosophical positions, such as the Cartesian Cogito, the certainty that some key early analytic philosophers (such as G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell) regarded common everyday experience (e.g., Moore’s assertion: *This is my hand!*), and rules in mathematics (Kripke 1982; Baker and Hacker 1986; Malcolm 1988; for various readings of the sceptical arguments in Wittgenstein see also the views of Wright, Conant, McManus and McGinn in McManus 2013). In this section of my paper, I focus on what I take to be the most relevant aspects of Wittgenstein’s intuitions regarding scepticism in his later works, focusing on the notes published by his students with the title *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969, from now on I will cite it as OC; for the importance of this work, see Morawetz 1978). The following texts are of key importance for us:

If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either. If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (OC, §§114-5; OC, §§514-5).

That is to say, the questions that we raise, and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn (OC § 341).

But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just can't investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put (OC § 343).

The key theme connecting these three quotations seems to be this: when you have to discuss a position that is not particularly certain, you need to find something more certain, in relative terms, which can be used as a foundation in the attempt to doubt and check all else. Global scepticism, on its own, just will not work. This is not solely for practical reasons, but also for theoretical ones. If all is doubted, there is no sense in using the word “doubt” as compared to “certain”. This Wittgensteinian emphasis on the role of “hinges” in OC (much like his use of “criterion” in *Philosophical Investigations*; see for example par. 353 and 354, where a criterion cannot be a specific behaviour, but the language game as a whole; see Hintikka and Hintikka 1989; Witherspoon 2011) does not just moderate epistemological and metaphysical scepticism, but can also help us find a satisfactory answer to sceptical attacks on the use of the direct mystical experience of God, as used in the hesychastic writings of St Gregory Palamas. There are disagreements among scholars of Wittgenstein as to the nature of these “hinges” (for example, whether they are propositional or not; whether they are normative or therapeutic; whether they are local or not; and whether they involve a judgement or are just signs and so on; see Pritchard 2011; Pritchard 2016; Moyal-Sharrock 2004; Moyal-Sharrock 2013; Coliva 2015; Salvatore 2015). However, whatever the nature of these “hinges” may be, the fact remains that, in contemporary epistemology, devices such as Wittgenstein's “hinges” are needed if anyone is to make sense of doubt. They provide non-rational grounds for other beliefs, non-propositional, visceral form of life that provide the firm foundation of our discourse. For Wittgenstein religious beliefs (for example about God) are like these hinges: they are non-rational and his idea about how hinges are like our religious beliefs has caused a major split between the Wittgenstein Fideists and Quasi-Fideists, and more widely between how Wittgenstein scholars take his intuition in par. 273 of *Philosophical Investigations* “Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)” (Hewitt 2019; Brenner 1996; Vettioli 2014; Barrett 1991; Bell, 1975; Harre, 2001; Hoyt 2007; Kerr, 1997). If anyone is to make sense of the doubts that one raises regarding the certainty of Palamas' views on the saints' direct mystical experiences of God via God's grace and divine energies, one has to accept that there need be devices in St Gregory Palamas' philosophy and theology that have the role of these “hinges”. What then are these in terms of St Gregory Palamas?

I wish to claim that these “hinges” upon which the door of Orthodox mysticism can open is the insistence by St Gregory Palamas on the literal value of the Gospels and other biblical canonical works, the hesychastic tradition, askesis and the mysteries of the Orthodox Church; according to St Gregory Palamas these can allow us to unite with God in a mystical way. St Gregory Palamas lived in a century where the established hesychastic practices and doctrines of Mt Athos came under attack by the newly arrived mediaeval Scholastic Varlaam and his followers. He had to defend hesychastic practices and theological positions, which he knew very well (having as his teachers Theoliptos of Philadelphia and the followers of Nicephoros the Hesychast at Mt Athos) and which he practiced himself in his monastic habit while at Mt Athos and the Skete of Veroia. To do so, against a global sceptical attack of the kind that Varlaam was attempting (arguing essentially that the monks of Mt Athos were idol worshipping their own navels, challenging directly in this way their direct mystical experience of God), forced him to find such “hinges” in the form of an insistence that: a) biblical texts have literal, not metaphorical, meaning; b) the pure in heart can unite with God and “know” God in this life through their personal participation in the mysteries of the Church, under the guidance of their spiritual father, through continuous askesis and prayer and via the reception of divine and personal energies; and c) God remains incomprehensible and unknowable to most people: because our finite understanding cannot understand the infinity of the Triune God. However, the Triune God is knowable to those who receive divine grace and energies in brief moments; they see Jesus transfigured (in the same way that the apostles saw Him at Mt Tabor). Jesus, as one of the persons of the Triune God, is knowable because He chose to receive the human body and become one with us, thus granting us the possibility of an ontological salvation (which was lost through our sin in Paradise). St Gregory Palamas, following the mystical theology of St Symeon the New Theologian and other mystical and hesychastic Fathers, insists that the Holy Mysteries of the Orthodox Church are the gateway to the energies that are needed for a human with a pure and clean heart, so that one can see and know God in the way that the students of Jesus saw His divine nature through the (sensible and divine) light emanating from His clothing. These truths assume the validity of “hinges” in the system of St Gregory Palamas and through them he and his followers can argue successfully against the scepticism and agnosticism of Varlaam, who puts into doubt all the monastic practices that St Gregory Palamas engaged in. It is these Orthodox hesychastic and mystical “hinges” that set the difference between the Christian mysticism of the West and the East. It is

these “hinges” that make Meister Eckhart’s and Hick’s interventions quite problematic and superfluous (not only for the East but also for the West; see here the criticism of Pike, who argues that they both fail, characteristically, to meet the demands of a proper and appropriate philosophical discussion of God; see Pike 1978).

In contemporary discussions, an emphasis on the epistemological role of mystical religious experience has seen a revival, especially after William James’ work on it (James 1917). For James, a mystical religious experience must have two characteristics: a) ineffability (it must depend on an inexpressible direct experience) and b) noetic quality (it should be connected to knowledge). Both characteristics exist in Orthodox mystical theology and philosophy, as in many other Christian (and non-Christian) mystical theologies and philosophies. James, however, would find Orthodox mysticism problematic: there is no naïve ontological optimism here; this direct mystical experience depends on absolute freedom in the relationship of humans and God, with full and deep acknowledgement of the fallen nature of humankind. St Gregory Palamas finds that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of purifying the heart, keeping the commandments through continuous askesis and ceaseless prayer, before God freely decides to reveal Himself via His divine energies to humans. James’ peculiar idea of mysticism was connected to his idea of “healthy-minded” religious optimism, which he saw abundant in the American religious currents of his time, bringing him into serious problems when he connected his idea of mysticism to ethics (Bixler 1925; Browning 1979). However, in the characteristically Orthodox East, the situation is rather different. Most of what James saw as “healthy” optimism, the Hesychasts would consider to be a severe mental illness and a transformation of the heart into a dull, numb, and impotent instrument. James’ rather poor conceptual apparatus has also been criticised by many cultural critics and philosophers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is why our project here, in finding devices such as Orthodox “hinges”, is important. Similar devices have been proposed in other studies of mysticism (see Mavrodes 1978; Phillips 1993; Phillips 2000). However, I wish to claim that they differ significantly in terms of their epistemological nature and the metaphysical limitations of the “hinges” they propose. I will discuss this further, in a future study.

Conclusions

In my preceding argument, I have supported the claim that there are certain philosophical and theological foundations of Orthodox

mysticism—these are the “hinges”, in other words, the firm foundations of Orthodox philosophy and Orthodox theology. They can be found in the key positions of the hesychastic mystical theology and philosophy of St Gregory Palamas. These “hinges” can be encapsulated in the following: a) God is incomprehensible but knowable; b) only the pure of heart can see and know God through their personal participation in the mysteries of the Orthodox Church and the divine energies that are available to those who approach the mysteries recommended by the Church; c) the Bible has literal truth, not metaphorical truth. It can be seen in this approach that there is no room for intellectualist mystical (or gnostic) tendencies; human knowledge may be considered an impediment if pursued in the wrong manner. Within the limitations of this work, I can only offer a brief sketch of the positions of St Gregory Palamas and their ramifications. However, I hope I have made it clear that in such a system, there is no need for the Indistinguishability Thesis of Meister Eckhart. This is because the mystical union can be achieved in a personal way and far more effectively and realistically within the proposals of St Gregory Palamas. Palamas preserves the literal truth of not only the biblical writings but also the truth and direct relevance of the Divine Names and other theological positions found in the Corpus Areopagiticum.

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6. CAN ST GREGORY PALAMAS “APPEAL TO EXPERIENCE” BE CONSIDERED AS (RADICAL) PHENOMENOLOGY?

PROFESSOR DAN CHIȚOIU

Abstract: In my paper, I will discuss one of St Gregory Palamas’ fundamental arguments, made when supporting his position in the hesychast controversy: the ‘appeal to experience’. Can this kind of argument be described as a *phenomenological* attitude? There are specific reasons for considering the Palamite doctrine as having a phenomenological dimension. If Gregory Palamas’ doctrine on the knowledge of God offers some very important answers to questions raised today in the philosophy of science; it also gives a specific description of what the nature of the phenomenon is, dealing with the ultimate or radical instance of phenomenality as the only possible and effective meeting between man and God.

Keywords: science, phenomenology, experience, humanism, Palamas, Michel Henry.

Introduction

When St Gregory Palamas sought to express his understanding on how God can be known, he used two kinds of sources, as well as two kinds of demonstration: the lived tradition of hesychasm and the written tradition of the Fathers. In doing this, he had to provide an answer in line with the cultural milieu of his epoch, and to the way his opponents constructed their discourse. As such, Palamas made use of Greek philosophy, especially the Aristotelian tradition. In doing so, Palamas responded to opponents of hesychastic practice and, implicitly, of hesychast anthropology and epistemology. He had to produce a new language and to frame a new way of arguing, because of the new philosophical horizon of that time: humanism. The cultural context of his

time was very different to the previous epochs when the Church Fathers had written. The Byzantine fourteenth century was a critical time for the history of European culture and society, marking a turning point between two theological visions and two cultural paradigms. These two ways to describe and to approach spiritual experience, as well as the way culture finds its role, assumed two anthropological paradigms, as well as two perspectives in describing the possibility of attaining true knowledge: the key point of this difference is the role of the intellect and the senses. For this reason, I consider it important to investigate why Palamas' discourse took the shape of a phenomenological investigation, considering his 'appeal to experience' as a way to obtain ultimate knowledge/experience, and what were the reasons for this kind of approach. I will then see if this discourse can be designated a form of radical phenomenology. I will do this by comparing it to the phenomenological investigation of the twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Henry, who is considered a 'radical' *par excellence*. Before this, I will start by evaluating the fourteenth-century hesychast dispute, which has multiple aspects that go beyond the theological and cultural levels and which is of great interest to philosophy.

Mystics as Philosophers versus Humanists as Philosophers: The Byzantine Context

Having an accurate understanding of the cultural milieu of the Byzantine fourteenth century is a task that is not easy. Describing the hesychast dispute between Gregory Palamas and his opponents as a mere opposition between humanist and mystical views is nothing more than misleading. The complexity of that cultural context can be properly evaluated if the particularities of two tendencies are taken into account, which were more or less present throughout the history of Byzantium. These are, on the one hand, expressing the radical novelty carried by the message of the Gospel and, on the other hand, preserving its ancestral heritage.

The first major step in the developing Byzantine cultural model of the fourth century was the innovation of language designated to express the novelty of the Christian message.

A key aspect of this was the novel understanding of God, and man, as *persons*. The Greek Fathers understood the notion of the *person* as the true designation of man. They achieved this by linking two concepts formerly operative in the Greek lexicon: *hypostasis* and *prosopon*. The patristic authors of the fourth century found themselves needing to

describe man as bearing the image of God and having freedom. The idea of freedom was unknown to the ancient Greeks, because the dominant idea was that the world was a "kosmos" with a systematic order. Man's freedom came into conflict with the harmony and the order dictated by *moira*. As such, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great took two frequently used concepts of the time and put them to work in a different context, giving them a different meaning. The notion of *hypostasis* was considered within classical Greek philosophy and Hellenism to be equivalent to *ousia*, but it received several nuances that reinforced a particular understanding of its real essence. Over the first couple of centuries after Christ, the term developed a more real and concrete meaning: that of a real being as opposed to an apparent and evanescent being. Gregory and Basil used this term in order to indicate a difference in the acceptance of such essences, thus indicating a way of being.

The Cappadocian Fathers developed the signification of the term: reality can only have a hypostatic dimension, there is no pure essence. However, the identification between *hypostasis* and *prosopon* is very significant. The term *prosopon* belonged to the old Greek vocabulary and signified the part of the head just under the forehead, which we today call the "face". It was particularly used to mean *mask*, as used by an actor in the ancient Greek theater. Theater, and especially tragedy, is the meeting place of human freedom with the necessity under which the world operated in the ancient Greek vision (Zizioulas 1985, p.32). It is known that, from the perspective of Greek philosophy, one cannot find grounds to argue about the real essence of a free human act, because what obsessed the mentality of Greek antiquity was the order and harmony of a world that was essentially a *cosmos*. For the Greeks who lived in that age, the world necessarily obeyed the power of an order that was conceived as omnipotent, rather than a logical scheme of things, which allowed no deviation from the laws of the harmony of the whole. Greek tragedy exploited the conflict between man's attempts to act according to his own will and to avoid his destiny, despite this approach being necessarily doomed to failure; the closing scene of an ancient tragedy recorded the fulfillment of necessity. The mask, in the ancient tragedy, is a superimposed element and not something pertaining to the actor's true identity. However, this meaning of *prosopon* was used by the Cappadocian Fathers in order to confer the desired dimension to understanding the personal modality of the existence of God in the Trinity and of human beings. An identification of the two gives an ontological dimension to "face", changing the meaning of the word. This was not just a transmutation of understanding, but involved the use of the words at

another level. In many cases, Greek philosophical concepts became signs of a reality beyond rational description, overcoming the possibility of defining and describing.

Another very important novelty brought about by the newly formed Byzantine cultural model was a different use of the term *philosophia*, with a meaning that emphasized its distance, but also its closeness to the inheritance of classical and Hellenistic Greek philosophy. The Gospel message brings a great and radical difference to the ways that the Supreme Reality, God, and His relationship with the world were understood. If, in the ancient Greek horizon, the major difference in the relationship between God and world was the one between the *non-generated* and *generated*; in the Gospel the difference between God and His creation was that between the *non-created* and *created* (Matsoukas 1997, p.124). This new understanding of the difference in nature between God and the world was full of consequences for the ways in which the possibility of knowledge was conceived. Before Christianity, it was stated that the possibility of knowing the truth was offered by the co-naturalness of the human mind with God, because the world was not ontologically different from God, but an emanation of Him. Yet, the Christian doctrine brings into the picture the vision of an unsurpassed abyss between the created mind and uncreated God and, therefore, it is impossible for the mind to find and see God on its own. For this reason, they had to reconsider the acceptance of philosophy as a truth searching exercise. To philosophise no longer meant to make a rational effort to grasp the mysteries of reality. But neither did it involve a rejection of the value of the classic philosophical exercise as found in Plato or Aristotle. This philosophical way of searching for truth was granted a preparatory role, however, a very important one, in the economy of searching out the ultimate purpose of the philosophic exercise. It was called *exoterike*. This did not suggest an inferior level, but it pointed out that this was the maximum possible that human effort could achieve in the quest for knowledge—what we might call knowledge from the *outside*. This *outside* relates to a lack of something that can offer true and complete knowledge, meaning it is outside the relation with what can deliver the truth.

For the entire cultural history of the Christian East, especially in the Byzantine period, practicing this outside philosophy was not considered to be a matter of forming the mind's ability to discern, because any higher experience had many dangers and offered the risk of falling into personal imagination and illusion, if the rational capacities were not completely formed. It was considered that a solid instruction in classical Greek philosophy could accomplish this formative task. For this spiritual

horizon, the truth is not a particular thing or an idea, but Someone (i.e., a person). This generates the possibility of reaching the truth via a personal relationship with the Truth as Someone, as a person. It becomes clear that it can no longer be about "objective knowledge" of the truth, but it suspends the much-used difference in modernity between the objective and the subjective (De Beauregard 1995, p.86). Therefore, there was an inner philosophy, coming *from the inside*, which received the name *esoterike* (fourth century). This philosophy does not rigorously follow classical Greek rationality: its specifics are given by what is characteristic to each person in his communion with the Logos, with God. This is the reason why, in its intimacy, this part of philosophy is situated beyond speech; it names the depth of the personal relationship between the Creator and the created, a relationship that is always unique and non-repeatable. Nevertheless, rationality is not absent from this experience, but takes superior forms, which cannot be simply located in discursive expression. This is also the place where the paradox of this expression lies; an experience which does not bypass reason, but cannot be put into words either. This is the most practical dimension of philosophy, one that involves the entire being, all the human capacities, and sees, as a consequence, a change in man of his depth. This is a condition that received the name *metanoia* in patristic works. This means a change of mind, but not as in a modification of its function or a decrease or alteration of its rational capacities, rather an opening of it up to understanding what is above creation, a *participation* in the uncreated. *Metanoia* is the path to *theosis*, the Greek name for deification, when one overcomes the limits of creation and has access to a knowledge that is beyond the world's frames. But the consequences of this experience are much greater, they imply the whole human being, even the body. There are changes also in the references to the world, in the way we interact with it so that we can talk about the *real* influence of man upon the world through his inner changes and not through external actions upon things. From this point of view, we can even say that a subtle influence, implying precisely the profound way of existence in the world, is the consequence of achieving this *metanoia*, rather than outer interaction with the objectivity of this world. An understanding of the person as the ground of reality and philosophy as an existential exercise to prepare for personal experience of the Other (God or man), constituted key elements in the novelty of the Byzantines. But, attaining *theosis* is not a result of man's efforts to gain the inner change; this is achievable only through God's grace. Even if one maintains a steady effort to change one's mind, deification can be achieved through the act the divine grace.

In Byzantine cultural history, there was another approach towards its ancient heritage, especially towards the classical philosophical approach. There were several reasons for this, but we can subsume them under the name of *humanism*. Even though it had an explicit religious interest, Byzantine humanism was not Christocentric, but it was concerned with man's capabilities to experience reality in its various forms, the highest form of experience being that of God. One can easily recognize the Neoplatonic doctrines as the background to this way of thinking, since the philosopher's practice, rather than divine grace, is important in the pathway to ultimate knowledge/experience, understood as a *union*. The humanist paradigm of philosophizing is epistemologically optimistic in that there exists the possibility that through their efforts, humans can attain true knowledge of reality or even of the Ultimate Reality, however this reality is conceived.

Until the seventh century, institutionalized study of the Neoplatonic doctrine was found at the schools of Athens and Alexandria. Interest in this way of philosophizing continued even after the formal closing of the Academy in Athens, but the revival of interest in the ancient philosophical texts is linked to the iconoclast dispute of the ninth century. With the end of this iconoclasm, an increasing number of humanist writings were produced, indicating the interest of the Byzantine public in ancient Greek writers. For many philosophers of the epoch, theology was no longer the core of their interest, as is the case with the works of Photius or the recopying of manuscripts by figures such as Arethas of Cesaree. In the eleventh century, Michael Psellos (c.1017-c.1078) and his school openly declared their dependency on Greek antiquity. Byzantine humanism was constantly in opposition to certain ecclesial circles, fighting against what they called the "new paganism". Ignatius, an opponent of Photius, was known for rejecting what he called the "hind wisdom". In the opinion of John Meyendorff, this was a true internal drama of Byzantine civilization (Meyendorff 1953, p.87). As Meyendorff remarks, in the eleventh century Psellos was a contemporary of Simeon the New Theologian, but they did not agree. While Psellos publicly confessed his love for Plato and Aristotle, Simeon rejected such profane learning. Psellos was accused of being committed to the "Greek tales" and had to appear before two patriarchs, Ioannis Xiphilin and Mihail Celularie, after being accused of rationalism. As Byzantine humanism developed, the reaction to it grew more powerful. In the eleventh century, the emperor Alexis Comnenos recommended that the reading of divine books took priority over those of Greek culture. The imperial recommendation materialized in court proceedings against Psellos' student, Ioan Italos, who

was convicted for teaching doctrines borrowed from pagan philosophers. These condemnations of Byzantine humanism had important consequences for the destiny of Byzantine culture and Byzantine Christianity. Overall, renewed interest in Greek philosophy did not lead in the East, as had happened in the West, to a new synthesis of Greek wisdom with Christian revelation. In the West, if after the rediscovery of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, scholasticism flourished and became the dominant mode of philosophizing, the Eastern Church remained loyal to the first synthesis made by the Church Fathers of the fourth century. It is true that the most vehement opponents of humanism, the monks, cultivated trends in mystical theology that developed independently and in opposition to the renewal of profane thought (Meyendorff 1953, p.89).

The fourteenth century was, culturally speaking, a more complex epoch compared to previous centuries, in the East, as in the West. As we can see, Byzantine humanism had a long history before this time and it now gained new interests and a new discourse. Some of this recent evolution occurred under the influence of Western thinking with its scholastic approaches to major themes in theology and philosophy and with its emerging form of humanism. That's why, when evaluating the particularities of the hesychast dispute, especially the first part of it, between Barlaam and Gregory Palamas, we have to take into account a different mindset and a cultural milieu at the borderline between mediaeval times and modern ones. The stakes of this quarrel are closely connected to the issues of early modernity. The best example can be found in the case of Barlaam. From Calabria, Southern Italy, he was of Greek origin and Orthodox faith. He spent his youth under the influence of the Italian humanism, but had a solid Orthodox family tradition. Barlaam went east to discover his ancestral faith. Constantinople was seen by him as the capital and the source of renewal in humanism and ancient philosophy. As Nicephorus Gregoras says, he wanted to study Aristotle in the original. This Calabrese had great success in Constantinople: in the early years of his stay he became acknowledged as a specialist not just in profane learning, but also in theology. Barlaam was later a delegate of Emperor Andronicus III Palaeologus and was appointed a professor of the School of Constantinople, teaching about the wisdom of Dionysius, as well as being recognized as a theologian. Even though he was influenced in his youth by Italian humanism, according to testimony from several Byzantines it is very hard to see a Latin influence on the early life of Barlaam in Constantinople. More than this, he wrote polemical anti-Latin works, which had great success among the Greeks even after his conviction. His authority was undisputed among the Greeks and he continued to influence

the views of certain thinkers even after his misadventures with Palamas. Balaam's main quest was the renewal of profane studies and in this he competed with other humanists, among which the most illustrious was Nicephorus Gregoras (Meyendorff 1953, p.93).

An early stage of the hesychast controversy was seen in the first letter of Gregory Palamas to Barlaam, highlighting the contradictions found in his writings. Palamas severely criticized Barlaam's idea of the impossibility of demonstrating what is related to God. Palamas tried to prove the effectiveness of theological demonstration, leaning heavily on the writings of the Fathers. Gregory began to develop his concept of demonstration opposing the dialectics of Barlaam, one based solely on the natural capacities of the human intellect and inapplicable to theology. The second letter that Palamas addressed to Barlaam clarified the link between the origins of the controversy being the discussion on the role of profane philosophy and the critique made by Barlaam of hesychast spirituality and practice. It becomes clear that there were two different understandings on the relationship between man and God: a humanistic one, having a clear agnostic tendency, and one based on a Christocentric mysticism, supporting a realist perspective (Meyendorff 1998, p.113). Gregory Palamas insisted that it was impossible to apply philosophical methods to theological matters. He admitted the genuine character of natural knowledge, but considered the difference between it and revealed wisdom was that, by itself, it cannot procure salvation. For Barlaam, there was a single kind of knowledge common to the Hellenes and Christians, one seeking the same purpose. Palamas' replies to Barlaam stressed that these two forms of knowledge had distinct ends and were based on two different organs of perception (Meyendorff 1998, p.127).

Palamas' Approach: Faith and Appeal to Experience

A hallmark of the Palamite anthropological and epistemological view is his conception of *faith*: for him faith was different to natural intellectual processes, being the equivalent of union with God. In his Triads, there are several passages where Palamas expresses his understanding of true faith as having nothing to do with moralism or pietism:

“Our holy faith is a vision of our hearts which goes beyond all sensation and all understanding, for it transcends all intellectual faculties of our souls. How is it that by this vision we see what is promised for us in the time without end, which is to come. By the senses? But faith is a firm assurance of our hopes; that is why the Apostle also called it ‘evidence of

things not seen'. Is there no intellectual faculty to see things we hope for? But how could that be, since they have never entered into the heart of man (I Cor. 2: 9)? And in another place: 'What is faith? Is it a natural faculty, or a supernatural one? Surely supernatural. That is why no one can go to the Father except through the Son, who has lifted us above ourselves, granted us the deifying simplicity, and brought us back to unity with the Father'. Whatever name we give it—union, sensation, knowledge, intellection, illumination—cannot be properly applied to it, or rather can properly be applied to it alone" (Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 33).

Faith is thus described as a supernatural faculty that grants the possibility of knowing God. Here we can evaluate the validity of the hypothesis for this present study: whether the Palamite doctrine can be described as a form of radical phenomenology. In the passage mentioned above, and in other places, faith is held to be a supernatural faculty, but not one associated exclusively with the spirit. In this way, Gregory surpasses any dualistic interpretation of the "spiritual senses", and so does not follow the tradition of Evagrius, which suggests that these senses were essentially a faculty of intelligence, as opposed to the body. Man is understood as a single and indivisible unity; supernatural grace is granted to the whole man and not to the mind alone (Meyendorff 1998, p.172). Man possesses intelligence and senses, which, transformed by grace, can help unite him with God. Palamas says that:

"The sensual and intellectual faculties constitute means of knowing beings; they are limited to beings, and manifest the Divine through these beings. But those who possess not only powers of sensation and intellection, but have also attained spiritual and supernatural grace, are not limited by beings in their knowledge, but know also spiritually, above sense and intelligence, that God is Spirit, for in their entirety they become God, and know God in God" (Palamas, *Triads*, II, 3, 31).

"Spiritual light is not only the object of vision; it is also the faculty enabling us to see; this is neither sensation nor intellection, but a spiritual power distinct, in its transcendence, from all created cognitive faculties" (Palamas, *Triads*, III, 2, 141).

Divine grace is not distinct from man, but is rather divine life granted to man. In this, it is not only the influential Platonic dualism between mind and body that is overcome, but a response is offered to the great dilemma of the Greek philosophical tradition: how can one nature participate in another nature. Greek philosophical tradition had a very strict use of the notion of nature and one nature was considered radically different from any other, such as the case of matter and spirit (mind or

soul); and one nature was held to be unable to mingle with another nature. This use of the notion of nature gave coherence to the classical Greek way of understanding reality, but it also gave new importance to the question of the relationship between distinct natures. We find different perspectives and answers to this question in all the great ancient Greek philosophers, starting with Plato. For example, the possibility of communication between body and soul was posited by Aristotle who proposed *pneuma* as an intermediary between the two; but he had to assign to it the status of a subtle matter. As a result, *pneuma* is a translator, an intermediary, which somehow can be understood by the soul when translating to it the information of the bodily senses. As long as this radical distinction between the natures was maintained, it had to answer the question of how one nature may have knowledge of another. This aspect became critical to Christian doctrine in which there is a strong difference between the World and its Creator, also known as the distinction between the *created* and the *non-created*. This is much more of a radical distinction when compared to the Neoplatonic one—that between the *generated* and the *non-generated*. There is no possibility of created beings gaining a knowledge of their Creator by using their capacities for knowledge. The only possibility is for the Creator to reveal Himself to His creation. An alternative way was described in Christianity of knowing the Creator: by His works of creation, by the way He created the world and by the way He acts in it. This path of knowledge became for Barlaam the only possibility of knowing God and he denied the possibility of a direct knowledge of God. What happened in *theophanies* or in the mystical experience of the saints, who had contact with the divine reality, was achieved only as *intelligible realities*. There was no fundamental distinction between the way saints had their mystical experience and the natural intellection (knowledge) of beings. The only possibility of knowledge for man was to contemplate creation and, by a path of deduction, to reach the First Cause. Following the Platonic tradition, according to which the faculty of imagination was the only possible link between the body and the divine, as well as Aristotle's description of the role of *pneuma*, Barlaam expressed a skepticism on any possibility of having direct experience of God (in other words, the possibility of an effective connection between the created and the uncreated or between the soul and the body, see Meyendorff 1998, p.187).

The “Appeal to Experience” as Radical Phenomenology?

In this section, we will seek to compare Palamas' appeal to experience with Michel Henry's phenomenological investigation, which

may be designated as a radical form *par excellence*. To assert the possibility of the appeal to experience as a central aspect of the Palamite doctrine that can be understood as a form of radical phenomenology, we shall try to compare it with Michel Henry's phenomenological investigation. Henry's approach to phenomenology is made up of what he calls the "nonintentional", opposing what he calls "onto-phenomenological monism". The nonintentional description of the phenomenality is of *apparition* always being ecstatic and transcendent. Henry talks of *living self-affection* as never appearing in intentionality; so, for him there should be affirmed a dualism of appearing, underlying the intentionally given, allowing life to reveal itself in pure immanence. There are two modes of appearing that are essentially different; living self-affection can *never* appear to intentionality, although the second is grounded in the first: they are two modes of appearing that are *essentially* different.

The very essence of appearing or manifestation lies in immanent self-affection; but intentional appearing is derived from and is second to pre-intentional affectivity. As Henry writes:

"[T]he interpretation of the flesh [bears] ineluctably in itself an Arch-Intelligibility, that of Life in which it is given to itself, in which it is made flesh. There is no flesh that is not self-affirming and self-legitimising in regard to its existence through that by which it is flesh, or rather, living flesh, carrying in itself Life, this Arch-Intelligibility that provides an unshakeable foundation" (Henry 2000, p.193).

Radical phenomenology excludes not only *intentionality*, but also *evidence*, as ways of accessing living self-affection, in other words, life. But, because any discourse appeals both to intentionality and evidence, the question put by the French philosopher is, taking into account that life is invisible, how can it be accessible through thought? How can a philosophy of life still be possible? Henry proposes to resolve this dilemma by reversing the question. Before asking how thought can get to life, one should ask how thought can come to itself. The certainty or indubitability of thought does not rely upon any form of vision or evidence, since intentional visibility has precisely failed to pass this "test" of certainty. But, this immanent givenness stands for the process through which life reveals and engenders itself as living subjectivity. It is not intelligible, not the logos of the Greek tradition, but *archintelligible*, the logos of life. Evidence is only possible as grounded in certainty, which is nothing but life's self-revelation. As such, Henryan radical phenomenology states that it is not thought that gives us access to life, but it is life that enables thought to access itself (Seyler 2013, pp.278-79).

The way that Gregory Palamas invokes the appeal to experience as providing effective knowledge and union with God can be considered a form of radical phenomenology for several reasons. Michel Henry talks about nonintentional apparition as being ecstatic: living self-affection never appears to intentionality as a human capacity. Gregory Palamas affirms that the natural senses cannot grant access to the knowledge of God, only the transformed senses have the capability of experiencing God. The similarities between these two perspectives lie in rejecting the possibility that the natural human capacities, rational and intuitive, can have true experience of the Ultimate Reality/Life. The only way to experience Truth is made possible by Truth Himself, and this is through transformation of man, giving him something beyond his natural powers by applying to him this *supra* human dimension. Palamas and Henry make use of special language when indicating that humans can have more than a human capacity of knowledge: Gregory talks of the “supernatural” while Michel invokes “archintelligibility”. Both concepts indicate a paradoxical situation: something is beyond a level of reality/being, but somehow it is present and active in it. This way of dealing with the great dilemma present in the entire philosophical tradition, i.e., whether a nature/level of reality can have a true knowledge or participate in another one, is a special one, because it retains a strong understanding of the fundamental difference between levels of reality/natures. At the same time, it grants them the means of communication/participation. Even if more or less paradoxical, or rather supra-rational, the effective possibility to have an effective knowledge of a reality total alien to one is the big question of a big quest in the long history of European thinking. If one allows Henryan thinking to have the title of a “radical phenomenological” investigation, it can be affirmed that the Palamite perspective can also receive this denomination.

One can ask here whether this resemblance is due to the influence that Palamas’ writings had on Michel Henry’s way of understanding phenomenology. The French thinker explicitly affirms in the first part of *Incarnation* that his phenomenological method has internal rigor and is not merely a result of a Gospel reading. If we read Henry’s texts carefully, we cannot find evident influence from the Palamite doctrine, either in the discourse or in the concepts. The conjunction between the two investigations is the result of a radical approach to the great question of how it is possible to gain knowledge of a total alien reality/being.

Conclusion

Following these final remarks, we can evaluate the "appeal to experience" invoked by Gregory Palamas not just as a decisive aspect in setting the identity of Eastern Christian theological doctrine and culture, but also as a version of radical phenomenological investigation, following the required rigor and coherence of this kind of approach. For this reason, the Palamite doctrine can be regarded as a philosophy, or as radical philosophizing, being of interest also for other forms of fundamental investigation, like those developed by quantum physics. But, for a consistent investigation of this phenomenological dimension of the Palamite way of arguing the possibility of radical knowledge/experience, we need have proper hermeneutic tools, including a careful exegesis of the way Palamas gave meanings to the main concepts of his discourse. Other authors of the Christian East can be investigated in a similar way, starting with the earlier Fathers of the Church. In this way, their intentions will be much better understood and the characteristics that guided a whole tradition into expressing the paradoxical union between man and God will be further elucidated.

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7. SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS' CRITIQUE OF "MIND-OUT-OF BODY" IN THE CONTEMPORARY PURVIEW OF MICHEL HENRY'S REVERSED PHENOMENOLOGY

PROFESSOR FR. MANUEL SUMARES

Abstract: This paper attempts to demonstrate the contemporary interest of Saint Gregory Palamas' thinking through his critique of the "Hellenic error" that he deems characterises pagan philosophy. We propose that Michel Henry's proposal of a "reversed phenomenology" meets' Saint Gregory's hesychastic vision at vital points and brings it into current relevance.

Keywords: hesychasm, Palamas, Henry, radical phenomenology, incognito, mind-out-of-body.

The following passage from Saint Gregory Palamas' *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* is the source of inspiration for this essay:

"...to make the mind 'go out' not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions—that is the greatest of the Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies, an invention of demons, a doctrine which engenders folly and is itself the product of madness" (Palamas 1983, 44).

The immediate context for Saint Gregory's severe judgment on the source of intellectual error cultivated by the pagan Greek philosophers is his famous fourteenth-century polemics with Barlaam. Its wider context corresponds to a tradition in patristic teaching cautioning against allowing fantasy to dominate our rational faculties and direction of thought. Moreover, to take him at his word, St Gregory seems to have discerned a

fault line in the practice of philosophy that has simply and generally been accepted as normal procedure. This he refers to as the most eminent “Hellenic error”, namely making the mind ‘go out’ of the body with the result of producing unreal constructs.

In any event, we can attribute no intention on his part to make more of an issue of it except to deflate Barlaam’s high appreciation of Greek philosophy. In that sense, like much patristic writing, *In Defence of the Holy Hesychasts*, or *The Triads*, was occasional, i.e., meant to address a specific problem and not part of systematic treatise with a life of its own. Themes and categories deployed in the argument were received from an honoured tradition and applied to suit and assimilate the particularities of new challenges. Still, in this specific case, it represents a crucial moment in the intellectual and spiritual history of the Orthodox Church. The events surrounding Barlaam’s challenge to the authenticity of the hesychastic experience as one of deification and Palamas’ response to it may be said to have an epical significance in how the Orthodox understand the aim of life in Christ.

In principle, Saint Gregory’s teachings concerning the full scope of *theosis* is not supposed to have an optional, or facultative, status for the Orthodox. After the departure of Barlaam to Italy, and in spite of the criticisms made by Gregory Akindynos of Palamas’ “innovations”, the Palamite doctrine received official sanction at two councils held in Constantinople in 1347 and 1351, considered by some Orthodox to constitute the Ninth Ecumenical Council. Nevertheless, the controversy over those themes that were questioned by Barlaam persisted during his later years and after his death in 1359. Even so, in Norman Russell’s words, with Saint Gregory Palamas’ canonisation in 1368 the hesychastic doctrine of *theosis* became “enshrined ... as the Orthodox Church’s noblest expression of the content and purpose of the spiritual life” (Russell 2004, p.309). St Gregory’s theological reinforcement of the validity of hesychastic experience was, and still is, feted as a triumphal moment for its confirmation of the Eastern Church’s approach to the Christian faith. In fact, since the middle of the fourteenth century, his achievement continues *ad intra* to be celebrated liturgically in conjunction with the Seventh Ecumenical Council’s restoration of icon veneration in 787, which was reaffirmed in the *Synodicon* of 843. The restoration of the icons came to be commemorated on the First Sunday of Great Lent as the “Triumph of Orthodoxy”. The Second Sunday of Great Lent, known as “the Sunday of Saint Gregory Palamas”, is informally referred to as the second triumph of Orthodoxy. It appears, thus, to have comparable import and be as distinctively an Orthodox trait as that of icon veneration. As far as the

content of the *Synodicon* is concerned, its acclamations of "memory eternal" and "anathema", provide criteria for the particular rationality that governs Orthodox tradition.

The pertinence of citing these historical details lies in the fact that both the defence of icons and the defence of hesychasm draw on Chalcedonian convictions about the repercussion of the Incarnation, e.g., the potential of human corporal existence to be in *theosis*. In conformity with the rationale that supports icon veneration, St Gregory's advocacy of hesychasm widens the scope of the empirical knowledge of God and admits ontological complicity between the visible and the invisible.

The Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* is, historically speaking, the result of complex polemics coming from challenges by pagan, Jewish, and heretical sources with which Christian Orthodox had to contend. The intent that sustains the doctrinal effort lies in the gradual explication of the consequences derived from the Incarnation. Above all, it refers to an experiential reality: knowledge of God may be, following Dionysius, apophatic, but this in no way implies that it is impossible for human beings. The essence of God is unknowable, but His glory, as in the transformative divine light experienced by the apostles on Mount Tabor, is truly received as divine. Thus, in accordance with the distinction of Essence and Energy that Palamas advocated against Balaam, whilst divine essence is not available for human participation as such, man can engage in and know divine reality through the uncreated energies, i.e., the uncreated grace that permeates all of creation. Meaning to conform to biblical revelation and the experience of the prophets, the apostles, and the saints, this distinction accentuates absolute divine freedom in regard to creation, but allows God's uncreated glory to be seen and experienced bodily by mankind. As defined by the hesychasts, the experience consists of a divine gift in synergy with human *askesis* by which divine life manifests itself, however briefly, in the immanence of the human body.

As for Barlaam of Calabria, he came to Constantinople as an Orthodox theologian who was knowledgeable in the ways of the West. He is known to have defended the Orthodox position in relation to the *filioque* clause in the Creed and seemed initially to have the Orthodox cause at heart. However, eventually, after having seen his theses anathematised, he returned to Italy and joined the Latin Church. It would seem that his Latin mode of thinking and the barrier that he encountered when confronted with a rival form of rationality are telling factors. From an Orthodox perspective, the issue is encapsulated in the rise of Scholasticism in the Western Church. As an acute observer of the impact made by Western rationalisation in terms of its theology and philosophical justification on

the Eastern Church, Father George Florovsky's views are worth noting.

Florovsky sees, for instance, that the progressive adoption of Scholastic modes of theology was associated with how the "Age" of the Fathers was interpreted in the two traditions. His succinct judgement on the theological quandary into which Orthodox thinking was thrown allows us to begin to see the difficulties inherent in making Palamite doctrine heard and evaluated in the West:

"From the Western point of view 'the Age of the Fathers' has been succeeded, and indeed superseded, by 'the Age of the Schoolmen,' which was an essential step forward. Since the rise of Scholasticism, 'Patristic theology' has been antiquated, has become actually a 'past age', a kind of archaic prelude. This point of view, legitimate for the West, has been, most unfortunately, accepted also by many in the East, blindly and uncritically. To regret the 'backwardness' of the East which never developed any 'Scholasticism' of its own. Or one should retire into the 'Ancient Age', in a more or less archeological manner, and practice what has been wittily described recently as a 'theology of repetition'. The latter, in fact, is just a peculiar form of imitative 'scholasticism'" (Florovsky 1972, p.105).

Taken at face value, Florovsky's mid-twentieth century observation of the Western understanding of Scholasticism as a sign of progress vis-à-vis a Patristic Age makes it seem that Eastern Orthodoxy finds itself in a lose/lose situation.

On the one hand, patristic thinking seems backwards, because it does not adopt a more systematic and argumentative approach to theology. On the other, its recourse to the repetition of the Fathers appears to represent a poor mimetic response to more intellectualist Western practices. But, this can arguably be true only if Scholasticism indeed represents an advance and if the Byzantine fixation on the Fathers really does represent backwardness, or even worse, an *ersatz* form of Scholastic exercise through obsessive repetition. We suspect, as Florovsky maintains in his own work, that something nearly the opposite of this situation is, both philosophically and theologically, closer to the mark in relation to the apostolic faith. We also suspect that St Gregory's citing of the "Hellenic error" touches on an even more fundamental trait of pagan philosophy with lasting consequences.

The question that St Gregory raises in relation to corporality and the noetic process finds, in many ways, a consonant development in Michel Henry's "reversed" (or "radical" or "post-Husserlian") phenomenology. A thoroughly modern philosopher, Henry's approach to ontology accentuates

the primacy of the appearance of Life as affective, instead of the exterior perceived by the senses and looked at by the mind; something akin to the Hellenic error¹. As we shall see further on, the latter reflects, for Henry, the bias of pagan philosophy that has dictated the terms of how philosophy has been done up to the present. It is, however, suggestive that Henry traces the former back to Christian revelation, establishing, in his final works and for philosophical reasons, its most definite source of ontological intelligibility in the Incarnation, a conviction maintained in manifest complicity with the Church Fathers. In Henry's words, reflecting a central theme in Palamite doctrine: "[...] the becoming man of God grounds the becoming God of man. Christian salvation does not consist in the dispensation of particular and all-eminent graces: it consists in the *deification* of man (Henry 2000, 23)".

In *I am the Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity, Incarnation: A Phenomenology of Flesh*, and *Words of Christ*, Henry recognises a direct thematic association between Absolute Life and the Christian God, centring his thinking on the possibility of our *capax Dei*. Working through the idea of the transcendental primacy of self-donating Absolute Life and the materiality of the Incarnation, he draws near to the hesychastic experience. We propose that his reversed phenomenology reinforces the fundamental lines of Saint Gregory's defence of the holy hesychasts and furthers, in contemporary terms, the possibilities for philosophical thought once the Hellenic error is bypassed. We shall, thus, begin with an account of the context in which Saint Gregory formulates his protest in relation to it. Then we shall see, in turn, that Henry's conjoining of the materiality of the Incarnation with the invisibility of Life itself enriches and renews the Saint's insight into the validity of the hesychastic life.

¹ Henry never claims to be anything but a philosopher, never confesses in his works an allegiance to a church body, and, thereby, does not explicitly have a specific theological stance to defend. Distinctions that would be typical in Orthodox theology's use of apophatic knowledge, divine freedom, and the distinguishing of divine essence from uncreated energies ought not to be expected in Henry's thinking. While the suggestion of divine freedom is difficult to find in it, some evidence of apophaticism and divine energies can be read into his "philosophy of Christianity". A form of these latter notions can be noted respectively in Henry's critique of referential language and in the unceasing self-donation of Life, both of which play an important part in his reversed phenomenology.

(1) St Gregory Palamas and the Hellenic Error

(a) Greek conceptual presumptions versus Athonite experience, at once corporal and divine.

The picture given to us at the outset of St Gregory's defence of his brother hesychasts is that of a rescue mission. St Gregory portrays himself as sought out by beleaguered Athonite monks that have been made the object of ridicule by a certain philosopher, who we understand to be Barlaam. The hesychasts' practices, observed by him and judged to be spiritually unsound, were denounced in publications that were in circulation, causing considerable discomfort amongst the monastics. In the voice of a distressed monk, Palamas, as the recipient of a summary of Barlaam's critique, considers the latter's recommendations for the benighted monks. These recommendations are tantamount to a programme for their enlightenment. The scene is set for a confrontation between a Latin Scholastic confidence in philosophical reason as preparation for divine knowledge and the Eastern grounding of *theologia* on experience; both are personal, i.e., corporal, and ecclesial.

From Barlaam's perspective, "Greek culture" is "a gift of God—on equal standing as those insights granted to the prophets and apostles through revelation" (Palamas 1983, p.25). Intellectual insights are considered truly what the monks should be seeking, but they must be given proper preparatory education to cultivate the powers of the soul, especially that which deals with knowledge, and discipline it against the passions. The greater the preparation through the various sources of knowledge available to it, the greater the possibility the mind has of overcoming ignorance and false opinions in its progress to know God through the natural world. The discipline of the speculative mind is held to be paramount. Concerned for the spiritual welfare of the monks, Barlaam suggests the deployment of a procedure that is recognisably Scholastic in nature, namely, "[...] the methods of distinction, syllogistic reasoning and analysis" (Meyendorf 1964, p.126). But, can a procedure that rests on natural reasoning as exemplified by the pagan philosophers do justice to the revealed God? Herein begins St Gregory's defence, marked by apophatic caution about the mind's capacity and by the underscoring of the empirical experience of divine grace.

True, he concedes, the pagan philosophers have a certain conception of God but not one that can appreciate "His blessed nature". In fact, they actually tend to mistake demons for gods. Whatever inherent dignity philosophy has on its own, a kind of hubris is likely to set in

whereby its natural ends are perverted. That is, it falls prey to demonic impulses that lead it to folly and contentiousness, even if they deem it wisdom:

"[...] Greek wisdom is 'demonic', on the grounds that it arouses quarrels and contains almost every kind of false teaching, and is alienated from its proper end, that is, the knowledge of God; but at same time recognise that it may have some participation in the good in a remote and inchoate manner. It should be remembered that no evil thing is evil insofar as it exists, but insofar as it is turned aside from the activity appropriate to it, and thus from the end assigned to this activity" (Palamas 1983, p.27).

The human intellect's penchant for self-delusion feeds on pride and leads to endless and inconsequential arguments. It may conceivably express a desire to discern God in the domain of creatures and, once grasping the truth, give glory to God. This would be the natural aim of philosophy, but it operates in fact unnaturally. And how is this demonstrated?

(b) Re-directing alienated spiritual powers towards personal transformation.

When the soul's faculties are not properly guided toward divine things, they miss the mark. The misuse of the powers of the soul engenders the unruly passions, just as the misuse of knowledge of created things engenders "wisdom which has become folly" (Palamas 1983, p.27). Nevertheless, the practice of philosophy has its rightful place and, once properly ascertained, may prove useful for the wellbeing of mankind—the kind of medicine that the snake's flesh can provide. To benefit from it, like the snake, you have to kill it first. St Gregory then proceeds to elaborate on the philosophy-as-snake simile that he has advanced for its edifying potential.

To get the best out of philosophy, the source of delusion about the intelligibility of primordial principles must be removed. Philosophical pretentiousness in regard to metaphysical knowledge is equated with the head of the snake that one would do well to sever. Humility will thus take the place of pride, which, in continuance with the simile, came into the world through the auspices of a snake's word. But, along with pride, philosophy's penchant to invent "fabulous stories concerning created things" needs likewise to be dwelt with and this is likened to cutting off the snake's tail (Palamas 1983, p.29). Now, with that accomplished, what remains of philosophy might do us some good, like the medicinal qualities

that can be extracted from the snake. Philosophy might then rightly be seen as a “gift of nature”, when rightly situated in the created order.

St Gregory’s lesson is clear: when the acquisition of sacred wisdom is at issue, it is not the affair of philosophers but those of pure of heart, such as the holy hesychasts. The Athonite monks neither speculate about divine things, nor did they need to have recourse to mythological explanations; through the spiritual practices of the Prayer of the Heart, they knew of the uncreated energies and the uncreated light by which they experienced, in their corporal condition, the presence of God. St Gregory grants that, before the Word became flesh, philosophy offered natural wisdom. But, the soul needed much more to bring it once again to its pristine beauty, in conformity with the divine image that inhabits it: “Do you not see that it is not the study of profane sciences which brings salvation, which purifies the cognitive faculty of the soul, and conforms it to the divine Archetype?” (Palamas 1983, p.30). That is, the purification of the intellect of pride and the tendency to create false speculative myths in such a way that it ontologically reflects the Word, through whom all things were made, is the path that leads to salvation. By themselves, the faculties of the soul of which philosophy depends and presupposes do not have within themselves the capacity to provide the conditions of spiritual wholeness.

Mystical knowledge is not, in sum, the result of the abstractive work of the intellect in full dialectical operation, but the power of the Spirit. The divine energies communicate “intellectual sensation”, the origin of which is neither the intellect nor the bodily senses. Firmly rooted in Dionysian tradition, Palamas accentuates the apophatic quality of the experience as an ontological union, more like that of the saints, than knowledge, as we usually conceive it, in speculative form:

“For at such a time man truly sees neither by the intellect nor by the body, but by the Spirit, and he knows that he sees supernaturally. [...] he knows not by what organ he sees this light, nor can he search out its nature, for the Spirit through whom he sees is untraceable” (Palamas 1983, 37-38).

Feeling comes into experience, but, as we propose shortly, it cannot be attributed to the organic body. For that matter, it cannot be perceived by the body as an object, but a kind of “subjective body”, which Michel Henry recovers from the work of Maine de Biran. For Palamas: “This hypostatic light, seen spiritually by the saints [...] is an illumination immaterial and divine, a grace invisibly seen and ignorantly known. *What* [its Essence] it is, they do not pretend to know” (Palamas 1983, p.57). A

true contemplative would never claim to have seen the essence of the Godhead. What they "know" is beyond knowledge and is best called "ignorance" (Palamas 1983, p.64).

Centred on God's philanthropy, the process of man's deification embraces apophaticism as part of its ascetic discipline of persistent conversion. The whole of the incarnate reality is expressed in the figure of the heart in which the rational and affective faculties interrelate, truly constituting the inner-life of the human person. Watchfulness in quietude (*hesychia*) of this subjective reality characterises the aim of the hesychast way of life as it seeks to delve into the divine life contained in the ensouled body. The spiritual practices of the hesychasts aim to connect with that internal dimension of corporality and illuminate this, from the inner invisibility outwards toward visible reality: "The hesychast will dispose his body in such a position, recall into the interior of the heart a power which is ever-flowing outwards through the faculty of sight" (Palamas 1983, p.57). Being in *theosis*, the intention of both mind and flesh is transformed from within. The ascetic practices and prayer that make possible spiritual progress cultivate sensations that result from the struggle to dominate the passions and engage with the permanent energy of the grace rooted in the soul, or self². These "blessed" practices and the intensity of their spiritual attainment provide the concrete context for manifestations of divine action that are incomprehensible to onlookers: "it is through the mediation of [the hesychasts'] souls and bodies that God effects things supernatural, mysterious and incomprehensible to the wise of this world" (Palamas 1983, p.53).

In defining the Hellenic error as postulating the mind to be separable from the body when it comes to speculative thought, St Gregory touches on a delicate point about the transparency of philosophical insight and its logical development. Does systematic reasoning, sharpened by the dialectics on the possible meaning, result in ontology or psychological constructs? For Christos Yannaras, such conceptual entities may lead us to an "artificial certainty that arises (and is proclaimed as 'truth') when subjective desire unconsciously objectifies its goal, transforming it into the illusion of real experience" (Yannaras 2013, p.57). In the place of an ontology constitutive of the immediacy of experience, philosophy tends to produce psychological constructs and thus creates conceptual idols, be they through rigorous rational argument or the creation of fantasies about the goal of human desire. Here we recognise an expression of the Hellenic

² Palamas reminds us of Jesus' teaching about knowledge of God and the practices of fasting and praying: "This is why the Lord taught us in the Gospels that prayer can do great things when combined with fasting" (Palamas 1983, 49).

error as St Gregory understood it, and a diagnosis of our civilisation and its nihilism.

At one level, St Gregory was surely addressing Barlaam's over-emphasis on pagan philosophical learning as sound preparation for the life of the spirit. In this case, the cardinal virtues, as taught by Plato and, especially, Aristotle, would create the infrastructure for the more perfect and sanctifying theological virtues: grace would take over from nature and give us a truer notion of God than that of the hesychasts. Part of the Hellenic error consists in this ontological (and not mere methodological) distinction between grace and nature. Palamas' Orthodox position affirms the divine presence in man with no real opposition between grace and nature: salvation will restore nature to its original condition and permit a natural contemplation of God amongst created things. In this is revealed an even more crucial aspect of the Hellenic error: contrary to the distancing implied in conceptualisation, there is, in synergetic union with God, no gap or absence. God's Essence is unknowable; yet, in His uncreated energies He is never absent, though He may be wilfully ignored or may be experienced as Other—not because He is absent, but rather because He is unknowable in His Essence. The emphasis is manifestly placed on human interiority and the invisible, but the determinate reality implied in these energies affects corporal experience, i.e., “flowing outwards” from the interiority of the heart, to illuminate the visible world encountered by the intellect.

Grosso modo, such a formulation of spiritual progress typically corresponds to the three phases emphasised in Orthodox teaching: purification of the heart in regard to the passions; illumination of the *nous* in regard to the natural order; and *theologia*, effectively deifying union with the divine Logos. However, and to be fair to Barlaam, the crux of the matter lies in the “mind-out-of-body” approach fostered by pagan philosophy; this can never truly deal with validity of the hesychast experience within the philosophical presuppositions with which he worked. Henry's more contemporary philosophical idiom, and the peculiarity of his reversed phenomenology, being very much adverse to the scholastic modes of thinking, can effectively do so.

(2) Michel Henry and the Reconfiguration of the Philosophical Task

(a) The Ontological Rehabilitation of the Invisible: Christianity's displacement of the primacy of perception.

For Michel Henry, philosophy at its best is phenomenological philosophy. This is a conviction that puts him firmly on the grounds of the kind of thinking, inaugurated by Descartes and the preoccupation with transcendental sources of intelligibility. Irreducible to conditions external to the inner operations that constitute the human subject, this philosophical practice demonstrates a resistance to considering what appears immediately before our eyes as a trustworthy point of departure for a rigorous philosophy. The true beginning of philosophical investigation consists, rather, in a movement inwards, to an antecedent capacity, a determinant "Before", which does not fall under the gaze of perception. It is, in short, invisible.

To this conviction, Henry associates another, one derived from Christian revelation, namely, Christianity's postulation of an active antecedent and invisible source of intelligibility for the human mind. This, he conjectures, might very well constitute a decisive influence on the adoption of a transcendental stance by modern philosophers:

"[...] philosophical thought is [...] capable of protesting against the temptation of common sense, which situates all reality in the visible world. In Descartes' *cogito* for example, in Kant's or Husserl's 'transcendental I', or even in the soul of the tradition, this reality is well and truly consigned to the realm of the invisible. One may say that these philosophical concepts themselves obey an inspiration of Christian origin. It makes no difference: with the development of philosophy, it is humans themselves, in an effort of thought which is specific to them, who manage to unblock illusions of naïve objectivism or materialism, in order to understand themselves in truth" (Henry 2012, 26).

In spite of his marked differences with the authors mentioned in this passage, as he demonstrates over the course of his writings, he shares their philosophical mission to resist "the temptation of common sense". By his expression "with the development of philosophy", Henry means that, especially in its modern forms, philosophy undergoes a dramatic alteration. This alteration is one that Henry will take to its ultimate consequences in the form of "the task of true philosophy", namely, the immanent organisation of conceptual categories in their relational engagement with the exteriority of transcendent givens.

Henry's way of dealing with the immanent/transcendent dichotomy is to treat it as reflecting the human condition, marked by ambivalence and a concomitant experience of "double appearing". He affirms an affective invisible interiority that appears in its radical originality as life itself. The perceived visible order appears, as if in a derivative order, as "world" and

external to life effectively and primarily experienced in its *pathos*. Under the influence of life unceasingly given, the living self feels alive without the least interior distancing from its ontological base, equated to the power of life in its absoluteness. Such is the focus of Henry's reversed phenomenology, bringing it into line with an Orthodox understanding of *apophasis*.

What is being reversed is the dominant tendency in philosophy to emphasise the world as the transcendent source of meaning, intelligibility and, indeed, even life. This may equally be the case for more "classical" forms of phenomenology:

"[The fixation on the primacy of perception] corrupts the whole of Western philosophy before even coming to phenomenology as such" (Henry 2000, p.49).

[The crisis of phenomenology found in Husserl] has its origin in Greece. Thus, it crosses the whole of the development of Western philosophy before determining phenomenology itself" (Henry 2000, p.55).

In effect, phenomenality and *Logos* are the same thing for Greek pagan philosophy, for both are contemplated as the world and evaluated as form, i.e., the idea, giving shape to matter and establishing the aim of philosophical reflection. We are, thereby, left with a model for developing philosophical argument that has significantly affected the historical Church in the West, much in the way suggested by Florovsky in regard to Scholasticism. What is missing in this philosophical positioning is the more biblically inspired mode of conceiving *Logos* as advanced by Christianity. The Christian sense of *Logos* proposes, "[...] a definition of man that is entirely new, unknown equally in Greece and in modernity: the definition of a man at once carnal and invisible—invisible in being carnal" (Henry 2000, pp.27-28). The implication of the paradox that sees humankind as both flesh and invisibility alludes manifestly to the Incarnate Word, but also to the real ambivalence of the human condition that it illuminates:

"The opposition of the visible to the invisible, which is taken up again and formulated in the Christian creed, has decisively philosophical import. [...] The analysis of the human body has established that the body is given to us in two different fashions: on the one hand, under the form of external, visible body in the fashion of other bodies in the universe; on the other, each person lives inwardly in his or her own body under the form of the invisible flesh, suffering and desiring, and is at one with it" (Henry 2012, p.17).

Any attempt to recover the dimensions of life's original revelatory power entails re-qualifying the standard immanent/transcendent opposition in terms of that which distinguishes the visible from the invisible. If indeed Life is first held as primary self-giving, it is not that towards which the human subject yearns ecstatically, as if going out of its self to an imagined beyond, figured as an external transcendence. Rather, the self, the *ipse*, inheres immanently and invisibly in Life. This goes contrary to the usual exercise of philosophical imagination, but that is because it has been determined by the prejudice related to the primacy of perception, i.e., the epistemic valorisation of that which appears to vision.

Labouring upon since his early *Essence of Manifestation* and developed in a series of intermediate works, Henry finally acknowledges the substance of his principal discoveries about embodied human subjectivity, as already anticipated in the conceptual creativity of those "great thinkers who were the Fathers of the Church" (Henry 2000, p.14); more precisely, those who had already endeavoured to use Greek concepts to express a truth that could not be more "anti-Greek", namely, the internal relation between human flesh and God, the essence of which is absolute Life:

"For the Fathers, the Christian God is indeed not the Greek god. In spite of not being able to think otherwise than in Greek, they experienced the self-donating reality of God as a living reality that they suffered but from which they drew the immense joy in the very life being lived *qua* donation" (Henry 2000, p.175).

Immanence, in its invisibility, is the medium of visible corporality, including transcendence. The experience of immanence constitutes the formative experience of the self-donating God. Seeing the invisible is tantamount to discerning in visible corporeality a language of effort and movement that communicates the *pathos* of someone's flesh, someone's Ego, integrated into a corporeality that is invisible. It is, thus, that ultimately the kenotic movement of divine action connotes effort and *pathos* from which human action takes its potential for affirming a (literally) *given* identity.

(b) Following the course of the Christian Cogito: the mind through the flesh.

In Henry's view, Descartes put philosophy on a revolutionary track, but it is Maine de Biran's accomplishment to have put it on a truer one by associating the *Ego cogito* with bodily movement and resistance.

Maine de Biran's discovery carries with it the consequence of evaluating human ipseity in dynamic and affective terms. The thinking Ego is fundamentally active, with a power translatable as a capability, as *I can*. *Qua* capability and affectivity, it retains its apodictic and transcendental status conceived now as a constitutive instance of a "subjective body", invisible and ontological *conditio qua non* for the body seen from the exterior:

"The 'transcendental' body is transcendental because it is the condition for the mundane body, the body that is felt. [...] A subject-body [must be seen as] over against an object-body and as its condition. A 'subjective body' *a priori* different from the objective body in that it appears as its foundation. [...] It is for this original and founding body that a theory is, before all else, required" (Henry 2000, p.159).

At one level, Maine de Biran's corrective critique of Cartesianism holds the promise of substantiating Henry's convictions about the invisible immanence of flesh as it relates to life. But, it likewise speaks to the phenomenality of the begotten Word made flesh and whose words address the human heart. To the degree that Cartesian demands of indubitability are still in question, so matters pertaining to the Incarnate Word and the heart also need to be dealt with in the same spirit.

The centre of Henry's position in this regard is based on the affirmative quality of subjective experience in opposition to the contingent and contentious character of referentiality that seeks an anchor for truth in the world. Ambivalence appears in what we conceive as rationality. We may seek to argue for the best account of happening open to view. Or we may proceed to trust in another kind of rationality operative under the sign of paradox, "another Logos that, in order to run counter to everything humans say or think of themselves reaches at the core of their being" (Henry 2000, pp.24-25). The effects of this Logos are truly known as affective experiences of life in its prescience, i.e., in life's revealing of itself.

Considered in its immanence and original appearing, the coming into the world as a living human being is a coming in "impressional" flesh, i.e., in the state of *pathos*. The flesh is marked by a particular kind of passive suffering, but also an accompanying joy that comes with its implicit affirmation of life. The proximity of Life to the flesh is absolute; it cannot cast itself outside itself, for Life, or the living God, embraces what it begets. The ontology that it represents is one of positive, affirming, impressional presence that, once admitted, is frankly disruptive to all that an essentially paganised philosophy has wrought:

"From the philosophical point of view, the definition of humans as deriving their reality from the Affectivity of life, and thus as living beings who do not cease to experience themselves in suffering or in joy, has revolutionary import. [...] It shatters the horizon of Greek thought which defined the human as a rational being; humans are distinguished from animals precisely through Reason, as being 'endowed with Logos'" (Henry 2000, p.13).

Thus, seen in its fullest depth, the suffering in the individual relates immediately to the "hidden process in which life arrives originally in its primitive suffering, in the Arch-Flesh and Arch-Pathos of its Arch-Revelation" (Henry 2000, p.187), all of which refer to the Incarnate Word and His Passion: all suffering of the living relates to it as its true measure.

It is to Saint Irenaeus that Henry attributes the first sustained argument about the reality of "pathetic" flesh as related to suffering, i.e., to the phenomenological material of life at once in direct opposition to the Greek notion of *bios* and in view of deification. The underlying question is how the flesh can receive life, even godly life. The flesh of the Word comes from the Word Himself—as a Life experiencing itself in its pure phenomenological material and pathos. This becomes the condition for all flesh that receives its reality from it and also its own capacity to act bodily in its manifest operations. On this basis, Henry establishes what he calls the Christian *cogito*:

"[T]he interpretation of the flesh [bears] ineluctably in itself an Arch-Intelligibility, that of Life in which it is given to itself, in which it is made flesh. There is no flesh that is not self-affirming and self-legitimising in regard to its existence through that by which it is flesh, or rather, living flesh, carrying in itself Life, this Arch-Intelligibility that provides an unshakeable foundation" (Henry 2000, p.193).

Corresponding to the idea of indubitability, the Arch-Intelligibility of Life, identified with the divine *Logos*, communicates from within the flesh of Life. Certainty obtains, thus, a new criterion because the "flesh cannot ever lie" and the fullness of Absolute Life, its Parousia, can be postulated as operative in the Arch-Flesh of the Arch-Son³.

The words of revelation that come from Christ and inhere in His being as the Word cannot deceive and cannot mislead. What they reveal calls for a safeguarding of the truth from distortion and that is why they

³ For a more complete treatment of this theme, see "Michel Henry's Idea of a *Christian Cogito*", in *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie* Tome 60, Decembre-Juillet, 2016, pp.177-190.

have to be heard and believed in a different way than those that involve the world: less anticipated in a formulated discourse and more received on trust, more a seeing of the visible through the invisible. Yet, human beings can, and chronically do, move out of this original condition, but how this happens remains a mystery for a philosophy fixed on the priority of perception. It cannot be “seen” but felt and accommodated. Philosophers may grant self-imputation as a basis for speaking about one’s self as a “me” in the accusative case and as an “I” in the nominative. But, philosophers cannot make sense of how these instances relate if they do not recognise the antecedence of the dimensions of transcendental and the implicit priority of the invisible. Here, it is the source of communication that becomes the issue. In order to give these instances their true consistency, an inward move must be made toward Life as first appearing and as the proper ontology for questions related to personhood:

“Of this singular me that I am, that each person is found to be, the only knowledge humanity possesses does not in fact derive from itself. It is not man who knows that he is a me, nor in general what a me is; it is not a man who knows what makes him a man. This knowledge is possessed by Life and Life alone. On the plane of thought, it is paradoxically Christianity that brings it” (Henry 2002, p.134).

Christianity involves a revelation precisely because it tells us about ourselves and gives rise to a different mode of thinking: as human persons, our origin is not the world, but grounded and generated by Life in its transcendental, all-encompassing reality. As human persons, we are not so much created as begotten: “This is Christianity’s thesis about man: a man is only a man insofar as he is a Son, a Son of Life, that is, of God” (Henry 2002, p.134). The process of self-discovery of our singularity gains in consistency to the degree that we turn our attention to the peculiarity of this Absolute Life and the Arch-Ipseity that reveals at once our divine source and the affiliation to which we are called.

The Life that characterises subjective immanence and affects the “me” does not translate into a rational exercise endeavouring to trace the way to God and, most especially, when salvation is at issue. The Beatitude that is possible cannot escape its *pathos*: not “a mediated rational approach” but an “affective fusion with divine life” (Henry 2002, p.154) that only a radical phenomenology can trace. It involves the flesh of someone—that of “me” that cannot be separated from its self and, by consequence, the Arch-Ipseity: there is no life without the First Self, experiencing itself as living and eventually in terms of Arch-Flesh—the Before-the-Flesh. Faith is the certitude of this Life, understood affectively

and revealed in its phenomenality and in its showing: "Access to the living God—access to Life—occurs only in Life, in the eternal process of its self-generation as self-revelation" (Henry 2002, p.157). Not so much a matter of knowledge, it is primarily one of access found in the trusting of Life as an unceasing gift.

If we are to speak of knowledge, then it would be more akin to the biblical kind: an intimate union within the economy of life and its *pathos*. It is a knowledge that remains such to the extent that it rests inseparably within Life, the Absolute Before, and the prior condition of the living: "Any becoming that can happen to him presupposes within the living that Absolute Before, to which this becoming ultimately returns" (Henry 2002, pp.163-64). The non-ecstatic inherence in the Life of the Arch-flesh constitutes an experiential opening to the birth of the "me" in the self-generation of Absolute Life in its *Logos*; it is its beginning as an *ipse* that has been given as that which is most certain. As in the "me" that takes its substance from Life's ipseity, impressional and affective flesh comes from the impressional and affective *pathos* of Life and unceasingly and joyfully returns to its self: "The flesh is precisely the way life makes itself Life" (Henry 2000, p.174). Our flesh that has been generated, the one that we actually have in suffering and joy, reflects the way our transcendental Self produces in us our given "me" and "ego". It is the process of the same kind of generation in Life: as our transcendental self derives from the Arch-Self, i.e., the Word, of Absolute Life, our very flesh derives from the Arch-Flesh, i.e., the Word.

Concluding reflections

Barlaam and the theological culture that he represents constituted a primary motive for Gregory Palamas' advocacy of the doctrine of *theosis* and, thereby, the Orthodox tradition as he received it. His response can be summarily described as incorporating the Spirit-centred practices of the hesychasts into the Christo-centric doctrine that dominated the teachings of the Greek Fathers. That is, he furthered the distinction between Essence and uncreated energies that he inherited from his tradition, while, guided by the Transfiguration's revelation of the fullness of Christ's incarnate reality, he underscored the effective communication of uncreated energies unto the life of the body. The uncreated light made manifest on Mount Tabor represents the most exalted and mystical form of man's divining of union with God. For his part, Henry's involvement with the specific ontology that came with the Incarnation does not derive from an explicit desire to defend a version of the Christian faith that conforms to a patristic

mode of understanding. Nevertheless, as we have hoped to show, he comes close to it, ironically, through the modern means of transcendental philosophy. In any event, according to his own confession, he attributes the raising of the questions that set him in that direction to an epiphanic moment experienced in the French Resistance:

“The experience of the Resistance and the *maquis* had a profound influence on my conception of life. The clandestinity gave me daily a keen (*aigue*) sense of the incognito. During this period we had to dissimulate what we thought and, even more so, what we did. Thanks to this permanent hypocrisy, the essence of truth revealed itself to me, that it is invisible. In the worst of moments when the world appeared atrocious, I experienced it in me as a secret to protect and that would protect me. A manifestation more profound and ancient than the world would determine our human condition”⁴.

The way that he would deal with the “essence of truth that is invisible”, a secret that protects but needs protection, lies in phenomenology, the only approach capable of bringing to the fore the original process of appearing, “more profound and ancient than the world”, determinate of who we are. As we have seen above, the primacy of perception, i.e., of the world, which still reigned in Husserl’s and Heidegger’s expressions, could not appreciate the experience of the eternal. Such an experience stands in contrast to the seeming inevitability of dissimulation and hypocrisy in mundane concerns. A reversed, or radical, phenomenology was his response. But, he recognised that the achievement of that project could only be in the Christian experience of God, or of Absolute Life, revealed in the Incarnate Word. It is at this point that Henry’s rigorous rendering of this experience brings him close to Palamas and his critique of the Hellenic error. Simply put, in spite of the seven centuries that separate their respective intellectual work, a common recognition of the consequences of Christian revelation for philosophy joins them together.

Palamas’ circumstantial criticism of Barlaam, and the latter’s claims about Greek philosophy, touch on the question of divine knowledge. Between what the hesychasts know by experience and what philosophical theologians think they know lies a very deep ditch indeed: no conceptual representation can do it justice, nor can it substitute Scripture and the

⁴ Cited by Paul Audi in his *Michel Henry: Une trajectoire philosophique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006, p.29). The passage is taken from “Indications biographiques. Entretien avec Roland Vaschalde”, in *Michel Henry, l’épreuve de la vie*, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy, 1996. All translations of passages taken from the French publications cited in this essay are my responsibility.

accumulated experience and witness of the saints as a measure of its degree of veracity. But, as we have underscored, the specific reference to making the mind go out of the body and the subsequent use of the snake simile played a crucial role in the explanation of the problem. Philosophical labour, marked by pride and imaginative speculation, ignores the need for disciplining the passions and acquiring a measure of spiritual health; this would be the condition for seeing the world aright. Interiority matters, but it will always involve corporeality. What Palamas recognised in the Hellenic error, Henry articulated more precisely as philosophy's fixation on perception, even in regard to subjective states. The intrinsic and immediate bond with Life shifts dramatically the understanding of ontology: it is alive, active, and powerful. In relation to this, Henry often expressed his appreciation of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. But, what Henry takes forward is Life as self-donation and communication; as begetting an ipseity that cannot but be felt affectively. Whilst Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were on to something crucial for philosophy, they could not avoid the temptation to represent the cosmic Will that undergirds all with mental constructs. However, Absolute Life (like Divine Essence) cannot be represented, but, yes, revealed and experienced (like the uncreated energies) in bodily life. The writings of the New Testament are truly read only when read as divine communication about who we are and the way we may be restored to divine filiation through Christ, the Arch-Ipseity. To conceive the ontological as Absolute Life necessarily alters how we consider immanence and transcendence. We believe that the resituating of these categories possibly constitutes one of Henry's most significant contributions to contemporary thought and may be useful for a renewed understanding of the hesychastic experience. It is usually the case that religious thought seeks to affirm transcendence as a necessary ingredient to justify God as necessary for a sound worldview. However, what the hesychasts experience as that which is brought about by the uncreated energies may be described in Henryan terms as that which supports the advance of self-transcendence *within* the immanence of Absolute Life. Consonant with the effects of noetic prayer, it reflects the bringing of the *nous* into the heart being illumined. Divine power is an unceasing communication of gift, of energy coming from above, from Absolute Life, affecting our selves and enabling the Ego with a capacity to think and act.

Henry associates *ekstasis* and analogy with the ontology that he rejects based on concepts that map the shape of the world, or what is revealed exteriorly. However, both terms can legitimately be conceived as part of self-transcendence in life where the Ego engages in kenotic synergy with the kenotic God, who is ever self-donating. Ontological participation

is here a matter of love, producing an ecstatic yearning for the Absolute that works its way out from within the ensouled body. It proceeds gradually, analogically, with *askesis*, but in reality, i.e., ontologically, it is not invented; it is lived in synergy with the source of Life. Moreover, its alterity is assured as an ipseity that becomes more like itself as it engages with the Arch-Ipseity.

The wisdom that motivated Saint Gregory's defence of the hesychasts, augmented by Michel Henry's unique phenomenological approach to "first appearing" as the affective experience of Life, can serve as a corrective to much of contemporary philosophy's assumption of nihilism. Above all, it preserves the dignity and full dimension of the human experience of immanence. For its part, nihilism is simply the conviction that one can make nothing—that which I will—into something (Cunningham 1996, p.10). It is, in that sense, a simulacrum of divine creation *ex nihilo*. The distinguishing feature between them is that the "real thing" is the source of life and the promise of more. As a subspecies of idolatry, nihilism's creations are of the human will acting autonomously, i.e., not in synergy with the divine will and ultimately a dead end. It remains, nevertheless, true that the power to make something out of nothing is God-given. Such freedom is consecrated in Orthodox doctrine and strongly affirmed by Henry: the Ego may turn towards that through which it is begotten and from which its capacities come; or it may turn away from it in (perhaps) wilful forgetfulness, in a kind of declaration of autonomy in favour of an ideal of unceasing self-creation. But, Henry also makes it clear how much ambivalence is inscribed in the human species, simultaneously an invisible interiority and a visible exteriority, and how much the decision comes into play as to what will become our ontological possibilities and in what direction we are to apply our efforts. Finally, we are still faced, and forever will be faced, with the most primordial and most pertinent of questions: to become gods without God, or with Him? This in itself presents the hesychastic commitment to *theosis* as the most consequent and maximal expression of one of these possibilities.

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8. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE'S RECOVERY OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS' THOUGHT AND ITS MULTIPLE SIGNIFICATIONS¹

PROFESSOR VIOREL VIZUREANU

Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the significance of Fr Dumitru Stăniloae's recovery of St Gregory Palamas' thought in Romania and abroad. I claim that Fr Dumitru's attempt to make St Gregory Palamas' theology a dominant theological current in the Orthodox world was accompanied by efforts at the recovery and re-establishment of the texts of the *Philokalia* in Orthodox spirituality. Fr Dumitru used both, constituting a change of mind and of heart, as part of an attempt at making Romania more Orthodox. In doing so, he influenced similar attempts abroad.

Keywords: Stăniloae, Palamas, *Philokalia*, Neopalamism.

Introduction

The centrality of Palamite thinking in Father Stăniloae's neopatristic synthesis is almost a commonplace topic of discussion and its importance has already been accepted by many commentators (Meyendorff 1980; Louth 2002; Ică jr. 2009). Saint Gregory Palamas was not just the main "source" of Father Stăniloae's dogmatics, but he was also considered a "master for spiritual contemplation" (Costa de Beauregard 2002, p.154).

¹ I would like to warmly thank Cristian Iftode, Manuel Sumares, Laurențiu Gheorghe and Constantin Vică who considerably improved the quality of this study by unconditionally offering me their generous support. I also wish to thank Constantinos Athanasopoulos who carefully reviewed the final version of the text and gave me many useful suggestions. However, without a doubt, the failings of this present scientific attempt are all mine.

Furthermore, as was often remarked, “[a]mong all the Church Fathers [...] none had a greater influence on Stăniloae’s thought than Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, perhaps because they were the most creative and daring Eastern theologians after the Cappadocians” (Bartoş 2002, p.209; see also Berger 2013). The main spiritual lesson Father Stăniloae learned from the former theologian was “the submersion of the concept of deification in the ocean of Christology, through a double transfiguring motion: the incarnation of the Logos first justifies and then determines the deification of the human person”. As regards the latter theologian, it has been stated that “the model employed by Stăniloae receives its final form from Gregory Palamas, through the involvement of the personal uncreated divine energies in the process of deification” (Bartoş 2002, p.209).

Despite being strong and constant, the relationship between Father Stăniloae and Saint Gregory² is a complex one, as well as being an extremely lively one; as such, it deserves meticulous analysis. The complexity in question derives, however, from the depth and richness of the spiritual lessons involved, both theoretical and practical, and not from some kind of hesitation by the Romanian theologian or from the message expressed in the Palamite texts.

In what follows, my modest aim consists of trying to sketch some crucial points that define, with clarity, the framework of this relationship in the context of what might broadly speaking be called the history of ideas. Besides these kinds of considerations, my paper will also present some relevant aspects of Father Stăniloae’s biography. Thus, without claiming to exhaust the subject, I shall structure my presentation according to the following points and I will briefly present the following:

- a. The peculiar place of several Palamite “ideas” in Father Stăniloae’s work.
- b. The significance of the discovery of Saint Gregory’s writings for Father Stăniloae’s personal Christian mission.
- c. The significance of Father Stăniloae’s exegesis of Saint Gregory’s writings for the destiny of Orthodoxy and hesychasm in Romania.
- d. The role played by Father Stăniloae’s work on Saint Gregory in the remarkable rediscovery of Palamite ideas in their original form for twentieth century Orthodoxy and the whole of Christianity.

² From now on, I simply use “Saint Gregory” instead of the whole name (“Saint Gregory Palamas”). Of course, all the citations remain the same as they are in the original.

Before briefly surveying the above-mentioned points, I wish to underline that, theologically speaking, the relation between Saint Gregory and Father Stăniloae is, in my view, important in two senses: as a way to reaffirm and show in a proper light the thought of Saint Gregory; and as a clear and powerful educative means to assert that “contemporary” Orthodoxy (always) has (to find) its sense only in the depths of tradition, i.e. in the enduring truth of faith.

A. The peculiar place of several Palamite “ideas” in the work of Father Stăniloae

One must speak here about some of Father Stăniloae’s conceptions, which were heavily influenced by what might be called Palamite positions. Certain scholars have already tried to explore this topic. Agachi, for instance, lists “four main areas where Stăniloae was highly influenced by Gregory Palamas” (2013, p.14), concerning several of his studies and books. These include: his entire interpretation of the history of the Church; the theme of deification; the distinction between essence and energies; and the liturgical aspect that embellishes all of his work.

However, my purpose here is neither to thoroughly review all these points nor to investigate any of them in minute detail. Instead, I will briefly highlight some of the aspects that seem relevant to me in the context of our present discussion, which is not particularly focused on “theoretical” analysis.

Firstly, and given the goal of my article, I wish to stress the *personalist character* of Father Stăniloae’s theology. As Andrew Louth aptly remarks (2002, pp.61-62), Father Stăniloae revives, through his writings, what he calls “the traditional (patristic and classical) ideal of the human person as a microcosm”. Louth cites Stăniloae, who states that:

“[...] the more correct way would be to consider man as a macrocosm, because he is called to comprehend the whole world within himself, as the one capable of comprehending it, without losing himself, for he is distinct from the world. Therefore, man effects a unity greater than the world exterior to himself, whereas on the contrary, the world, as cosmos, as nature, cannot contain man fully within itself, without losing him, that is, without losing in this way the most important part of reality, that part which, more than all others, gives reality its meaning. The idea that man is called to become a world [...] has a more precise expression, however, in the term ‘macro-anthropos’” (1994, p.4).

We find here a fruitful deepening of this classical position through the powerful echoing of Saint Maximus' and Saint Gregory's views on the topic. In conclusion, for Louth this inspired appropriation decisively places "the personal at the centre of Fr. Dumitru's doctrine of creation and gives the personal cosmic significance".

Secondly, what might be labelled here theological personalism is closely linked to the topic of *deification*. Alongside other thinkers, like Andrew Louth or Norman Russell, Paul M. Collins sees Father Stăniloae as one of the contemporary theologians who "have argued that the doctrine of deification, which is a core feature of Orthodoxy, is part of an overarching conceptuality of the divine purposes in creating and redeeming the cosmos in Orthodoxy". To put it succinctly, the Orthodox theological discourse on deification in the twentieth century (and consequently that of Father Stăniloae too) was, in Collins' view, dominated by two figures: Saint Maximus and Saint Gregory. It may be stated then that "[t]he conceptuality of deification in Orthodoxy today is a synthesis of the ideas of these two writers constructed by Orthodox authors in the twentieth century" (2010, p.76).

Of decisive importance in this context is *the distinction between essence and energies*. K. Ware was one of the first to emphasize its significant role not only in the work of Father Stăniloae itself, but also in the context of the entirety of Orthodox dogmatics. Broadly speaking, the presence of the Palamite contribution to contemporary Orthodox theology is as summarized in the following: "The Palamite teaching is ignored in the Dogmatic of Androutsos and allowed no more than a passing mention in that of Trembelas. There is no reference to it in the main text of Fr. Michael Pomazansky's *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, although a few lines are devoted to St. Gregory Palamas in an appendix". Unsurprisingly, K. Ware states that the central place Father Stăniloae "assigns to this distinction is a new and significant development so far as the works of modern dogmatic theology are concerned. [...] Fr. Dumitru's is thus the first dogmatics in which the distinction is seen as fundamental to the Orthodox understanding of God" (cited in Agachi 2013, p.20).

I also suggest that Olivier Clément gives evidence for the claim that Father Stăniloae applies this Palamite distinction to his anthropology, thus trying to show that each person is an inaccessible secret revealed only by the grace of love (1993, p.84). I distance myself, therefore, from positions like that of A. N. Williams, for whom Father Stăniloae, in this particular context, "holds firm to the notion that we have access only to the divine as it is manifested in the created realm but seems to regard the distinction as notional, articulating a position that sounds rather

Thomistic” (1999, p.200).

On such firm Palamite grounds, Father Stăniloae could keep together (and keep alive!), in man’s relation with God, both accessibility and inaccessibility³; proximity and distance. In this way, he could make sense of a conception of knowledge based on personal behaviour (i.e., effort) aimed at attaining what is close to you and constitutes your innermost and valuable essence.

This problem is intimately linked to the way in which we conceive (or, better, we live in) God, and with that of the philosophical influence seen in Western Scholastic theology. In this sense, the peculiar contribution of Saint Gregory, to which Father Stăniloae explicitly adheres, is:

“[...] to put into light a concept about God which is superior to the one that reduces Him to an essence conceived in a simplistic manner, or to an essence that ignores His works, being preoccupied only by His unity and not understanding that God is present in His works as a triadic unity of persons, which is something else than the simplistic unity of the philosophers” (1977, p.222).

It is also possible to see in the last writings published by Father Stăniloae a revival of this crucial Palamite distinction. I. Ică Jr. appreciates that this is due to P. Chrestou’s modern critical edition of Saint Gregory’s works published in 1962. He also states that we find in Father Stăniloae’s first volume of *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (*Teologia dogmatic ortodoxă*), from 1978, an “extraordinary rewriting of the chapter about the divine attributes [which are] all presented as divine energies communicated to the creatures as real participations to God” (Ică Jr. 2009, p.36). It has been argued that in all three volumes of this eloquent neopatristic approach, “the essential concepts of St Gregory Palamas have played a significant role”, enabling us to speak about “*the systematic character of Father Stăniloae’s Neo-Palamite contribution*” (Agachi 2013, p.2 my emphasis)⁴.

³ An aspect that is well captured by the subtitle chosen by Constantinos Athanasopoulos for his 2015 edited volume, *Triune God: Incomprehensible but Knowable—The Philosophical and Theological Significance of Saint Gregory Palamas for Contemporary Philosophy and Theology*.

⁴ A brief but necessary remark on the use of the term “Neo-Palamite”, and even that of “Palamite”. Of course, the discussion could be the same for “Neo-Palamism” (the latter is not used by me, but has appeared in the works of some of the authors cited). Agachi not only uses the first term, but he also includes it in the title of his work on Saint Gregory: *The Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae* (2013). Terms like these are not intended, at least by me, to be used in a

Of course, for Father Stăniloae Saint Gregory's thinking is not a closed "container" of theological ideas, some being useful for his own theological systematization, but an invaluable "source" that also irradiates and illuminates the writings of his predecessors—what might broadly be considered a hermeneutic tool.

For instance, speaking about Saint Maximus and his appreciation of Melchizedek as offering an expression of the uncreated and divine grace that exists beyond eternity, [above] all being and all time, Father Stăniloae considers that, thereby, he refers to the teaching of Saint Gregory before Saint Gregory himself (Berger 2013, p.20, n.75).

In addition, as a concrete example, we can see that for him:

"When we put the ideas of St. Gregory Palamas together with those of Gregory of Cyprus we may rightly consider that the former throws fresh light on the thought of the Cypriot. The irradiation of the Spirit from the Son is nothing other than the response of the Son's love to the loving initiative of the Father who causes the Spirit to proceed" (Stăniloae 1980, p.31).

It has been stated that some readings of Stăniloae's views on topics developed by other contemporary theologians were informed by Saint Gregory's thinking. For instance, C. Berger appreciates that Father Stăniloae's analysis of Father Bulgakov's theory of *kenosis* "reveals a key-feature of his synthesis: the permanent intertwining of the thinking of Saint Maximus with that of Saint Gregory Palamas" (2013, p.15).

I think that here, also, would be the place to briefly mention the importance of the content of *practical* Palamite theology for Father

somewhat reified way, as expressing an attribute or a quality of a theological position in itself or, moreover, the mark of a school/current of thought. They only designate the active and decisive presence (and, as such, the retrieval) of some of Saint Gregory's ideas (concepts, distinctions, etc.) in the works of some of the important theologians of the twentieth century. However, this is not the road followed by Agachi, for whom Neo-Palamism has a doctrinal character, being the "presentation and interpretation of Palamism in the modern period" (2013, p.2). I fully agree here with Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (2011), for whom this kind of occurrence are *per se* intimately linked with the rejection of hesychasm as a real practice for the "textual theory" of Saint Gregory, and refer to his ideas only from an abstract, literal point of view. It would be, and I accept this, something strange and false for an Orthodox theological approach. Synthetically, in the words of Metropolitan H. Vlachos, "the terms «palamite» and «neopalamite» theology belong outside the Orthodox Tradition and are a danger to the foundations of Orthodox theology".

Stăniloae. The ideas we referred to above were, in his view, not abstract, simple cognitive assertions, but mandatory landmarks; real teachings for a concrete Orthodox spiritual ascension. This aspect can be well understood in the light of Metropolitan H. Vlachos' opinions about the impossibility of splitting (or of separately "analysing") the teachings on "the relationship and the difference between Essence and Energy, as expressed by Saint Gregory Palamas" in terms of the practical matrix of the hesychast tradition, which for him "is in fact the path for a personal partaking of the uncreated energy of God" (2011).

Speaking about these uncreated energies working within us, which are distinct from the divine being that remains incommunicable, Father Stăniloae explicitly acknowledges that Saint Gregory's attempt at emphasizing them made him understand "the importance which Holy Fathers gave to the work of God in believers, to continuous transformation done by God, to deification. I understood that God is not closed in Himself and that men are not separated from Him and between them" (Lemeni 2013, p.130, n.370; Lemeni cites the interview given by Father Stăniloae to F. Strazzari and L. Prezzi in 1989). This aspect is further developed in this paper, since it is connected with other points of my analysis.

b. The significance of Father Stăniloae's discovery of Saint Gregory's writings for his personal Christian destiny

In this sense, we should note that the Palamite works changed, in a particular and effective way, and continuously shaped Father Stăniloae's Orthodox spiritual destiny. It is well known that Father Stăniloae initially abandoned the theological direction in his youth and joined the Faculty of Literature at the University of Bucharest for one year (1923-1924), disappointed in how the former could really contribute to his Christian evolution.

Only Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan's⁵ insistence determined him to restart and finish his theological studies in Cernăuți⁶, where he also obtained his Ph.D. He then continued his studies in Germany, followed by many stages in Athens, Munich, Berlin, Paris, etc. From 1927 to 1929, he discovered and intensively worked in these libraries on the Palamite manuscripts, making copies, and finally using them in his seminal monograph on Saint Gregory (1938) (Berger 2013, p.10).

⁵ Nicolae Bălan (1882-1955) was the Metropolitan of Transylvania from 1920 until his death.

⁶ Situated in Romania, at that time.

As I have already stressed, the discovery of the Palamite texts did not just represent a simple “scientific” discovery, but also a profound shaping of his own destiny. Father Stăniloae confessed that in the writings of Saint Gregory he “found a God Who comes to man, opening Himself to him as light through prayer. God fills the man with His energies, remaining however incommunicable [...] incomprehensible, apophatic” (cited in Berger 2013, pp.9-10).

In the first instance, we should stress that Father Stăniloae's separation from an entire tradition, one that was not only dominated by abstract Western Scholastic and philosophical theology, but also one, in form at least, that contained some of the most important achievements of Orthodox theology and which had a big impact in his time, as exemplified by Androutsos⁷ and Trembelas⁸. Father Stăniloae had an accurate knowledge of this kind of manual of theology, being the translator into Romanian of Androutsos' course on dogmatics in 1930.

I would go even further here by stressing that only this separation could really give birth to a neopatristic synthesis. R. Bordeianu, who firmly contends that Father Stăniloae offers such an attempt, in the spirit of what G. Florovski conceived, leads us to believe such a statement and presents, in order to support his thesis, the “theological and biographical elements that attest to Stăniloae's departure from a manual of theology” (2013, p.240). Some interpreters even stated that Father Stăniloae was “among the first to break with the scholastic approach that dominated Christian theology during the first half of the twentieth century” (Turcescu 2002, p.7; for discussion on this point, also see Louth 2002, especially p.62, and Henkel 2002).

For D. Lemeni, Father Stăniloae, in his original neopatristic synthesis, left Scholasticism behind in a twofold sense, in an attempt to answer Androutsos' academically fashioned *Dogmatics*. Firstly, he aimed to replace this kind of abstract intellectualism with a strong appeal to “the criterion of the hesychast-type mystical experience”. Secondly, he sought to oppose Thomistic essentialism—a “communitarian personalism as a model of triune and ecclesiastical communion between God and creation” (2013, p.122, n.351).

⁷ Chrestos Androutsos (1869-1935) was an eminent Greek theologian and professor of dogmatics at the University of Athens and the author of an influential *Dogmatics*, a systematic exposition of Orthodox doctrine (Ohme 2011).

⁸ Panayotis Trembelas (1886-1977) was an important Greek theologian, influenced by the thought of C. Androutsos, author of *Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, which was for thirty years the official manual used by students in Greek theological faculties (Arjakovsky 2014, p.181).

Here I should also mention the so-called religious philosophy, developed mainly in Russia, by thinkers who saw Orthodoxy as an original answer to the problems of contemporary philosophy. To put it briefly, it was asserted that both “academic theology”, like that of the already mentioned Androutsos and Trembelas, and the religious philosophy of Soloviov, Bulgakov, Florenski, etc., although being “big impact theologies” and different from each other, were, in their deep essence, “abstract and speculative theologies [...] isolated somehow from the Orthodox ecclesial framework, from the liturgical experience and, in general, from all that constitutes Orthodox spirituality” (Lemeni 2013, p.121). We should also speak about the true and lively relation that man has with God, and here the role of Saint Gregory for Father Stăniloae was indeed a decisive one. As he acknowledged himself:

“Both dialectical theology and the theology of St Gregory Palamas made me see a living God, a personal God; yet, while in dialectical theology God was separated from man, because of the latter’s incapacity to discard his sins, in the Palamite theology God is moving towards man, when He is invoked through praying. In dialectical theology, I have found the image of a detached unemotional God, whereas, in Palamite theology, I have encountered a God that is close to man, who opens up to man, enlightening him, whenever he is praying. He fills man with His energies, simultaneously remaining incommensurable, incomprehensible, and apophatic [in His being]” (Grigorescu 2006, p.263; Grigorescu quotes himself from Maciej Bielawski, *Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae. O viziune filocalică despre lume*, Deisis, Sibiu 1998).

It would definitely be a mistake to interpret this second significance in a Western “individualistic” sense. The destiny with which we are concerned here is not only the one of Father Stăniloae himself, because it also somehow belongs to Orthodoxy as a whole (and I could add that this is true for all real Orthodox theologians). As Father Dumitru Popescu aptly remarked, the main conclusion of Father Stăniloae’s monograph, *The Life and the Teachings of Saint Gregory Palamas*, was that only Palamite theology could be the right answer to the overwhelming problems of contemporary man (Popescu 2002, p.17). This offers a concrete exemplification of, and support for, Father Stăniloae’s credo, according to which “Orthodoxy perfectly responds to the spiritual needs of today’s people that kept it alive” (Stăniloae 1970, p.730).

Moreover, by studying the works of Saint Gregory, he became aware of the crucial role of the hesychast tradition for configuring an Orthodox dogmatics and giving support for contemporary man's condition. This position further opened up for him the real urgency of studying and translating the *Philokalia* into Romanian. In addition, one has to note that Father Stăniloae does not compose a different kind of work to that of the first editors of the *Philokalia*, because, as Ware argues, they were themselves “followers of the interpretation of Hesychasm associated with Gregory Palamas”. It should be emphasised in this context that “Nikodimos [himself] edited a three-volume collection of Palamas' works, although it was never published” (Collins 2010, p.90). As is well known, Father Stăniloae included in his version of the *Philokalia* many more excerpts (and replaced certain of them) from Saint Gregory than in the original edition. This also offers clear proof that he saw a vivid continuity between the thought and practices of the Holy Fathers and the Palamite ones; and that they were destined to make a real impact on the salvation of contemporary man.

This point will be further strengthened, if we notice that the two, apparently distinct, dimensions of twentieth century Orthodox spirituality—the *Philokalic* and the Neopalamite—could be used interchangeably by referring to Father Stăniloae. For A. Louth, for instance, Father Stăniloae, along with other great names of twentieth century Orthodox theology, like Lossky, Florovsky, Meyendorff, Nellas, Mantzaridis, Archimandrite Sophrony and Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, “can be regarded as standing in a ‘Philokalic’ or ‘Neo-Palamite’ tradition” (2004, p.88). In addition, for the use of the identification of “neopatristic” with “Neopalamite” attributes, at least concerning Father Stăniloae's writings, one should see Agachi (2013).

As we have already said, what is of significance here is not just the presence of some of the landmark ideas of a “thinker” in a theological work or even in a strict individual destiny. We may say that what was determined in Saint Gregory by Father Stăniloae was the very questioning of the relationship between theology itself and Christian spiritual life—between “theory” and “practice” in Orthodoxy. Father Dumitru Popescu remarked once that “[t]he whole work of Father Stăniloae is directed by the desire to confer a spiritual foundation to the dogmatic teachings of the Church, to create a synthesis between theology and spirituality” (Popescu 2002, p.17). This urgency is not just exegetic, but also derived from the concrete situation of Orthodox life in Romania and in the Christian space.

c. The significance of Father Stăniloae's exegesis of Saint Gregory's writings in the destiny of Orthodoxy and hesychasm in Romania

Father Stăniloae's 1938 book was not his first attempt to describe Saint Gregory's contribution to the life of Orthodoxy. We should also note here a brief study published 1929-1930: "The Way to the Divine Light in Saint Gregory Palamas". In a review of it, Archimandrite Iustin Suciu noted certain important features of Father Stăniloae's approach: the fact that Father Stăniloae worked on previously unpublished manuscripts and offered important, "new" milestones for Orthodox' faith; the recognition that the believer, at least in the Romanian space, has the opportunity to make contact with some glorious pages of the Oriental mystic tradition, previously "covered by dust". The report concludes by asserting that it would be appropriate for the author to further give the public "an accurate history of the hesychast mysticism" (excerpts from the Archive of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, file nr.2672, *Revista Studii Teologice*, 2015).

In this sense, we should see Father Stăniloae's further study (but also his entire theology) as a spiritual achievement based on his previous reflections on Palamite ideas. We have in view here the study called *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man* (1943), published five years after his book on Saint Gregory. It was the first time in Romanian theology that the ontological aspect of redemption, inspired by the Holy Fathers and peculiar to the Orthodox teachings about it, was highlighted: we are thus passing from "an exposition similar to textbooks and catechisms to a theological-scientific, but also a spiritual depth" (Radu 1983, cited in Păcurariu 2002, p.50).

The links between Father Stăniloae's Palamite study, his further theology, and the true revival of Orthodoxy in the Romanian space, were all synthetically stressed by John Meyendorff:

"In 1938, his short but extraordinarily well-documented book on *The Life and Teaching of St. Gregory Palamas* was published in Sibiu. Stăniloae's vision of God and of man's destiny abandons Western concepts shaped during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: he discovered the soteriology of the Greek Fathers, the dimensions of divine-human communion and cosmic transfiguration. His book on *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man* (1943) conveyed this discovery to a wider readership and defined Stăniloae as a pioneer of theological and spiritual revival in Romania" (1980, p.8).

We have already seen that his pioneering contact with Palamite manuscripts strongly motivated Father Stăniloae to undertake a thorough study of the *Philokalia* and its translation into Romanian. His study on Saint Gregory was indeed appreciated as a “first” and a “significant” step” in this direction (Lemeni 2013, p.131).

We should also mention, as belonging to the same trend, the appraisal made by S. Totu. Speaking about *Jesus Christ, or the Restoration of Man*, Totu states that maybe it is no accident that this work was written *between* the monograph about Saint Gregory in 1938 and the first volume of the *Philokalia* in 1946 “because between the *time* in which Saint Gregory Palamas defended Christianity from the anti-monastic attack [of Barlaam] and this *time*, when Father Dumitru Stăniloae decided to write, there is, maybe not by accident, an indubitable resemblance” (Totu 2015, pp.32-33).

It is hard to “accurately” estimate the result of this spiritual process, but at least we may assert the simple fact that, by so doing, he made possible the retrieval of “a tradition that previously was in agony”. He initiated “the renaissance of the monastic life in Romania” (Mrozek cited by Gheorghiu 2002, p.108). Of course, the agony mentioned before should not be taken as an expression of a continuous historical state of affairs in the Romanian monastic realm, but as a sign of a certain temporary “weakness” of the hesychast movement in Romania. In fact, its history is “dotted” with such “ups and downs”. Among the “ups”, I should mention the Paisianist *Philokalic* movement in eighteenth century Moldavia and the intense activity of Saint Calinic of Cernica in nineteenth century Walachia.

In my opinion, there is another pertinent observation that should be stressed here. Making an appeal to the exegesis of great theologians like St Gregory Palamas (as well as St Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, St Maximus the Confessor, and St Symeon the New Theologian) is a crucial point in the particular context of the twentieth century, which was deeply affected by a violent process of modernization and characterized by extreme spiritual turmoil. What I want to stress here is that it was not by accident that the strong re-appropriation of the patristic and Palamite tradition in twentieth century Orthodoxy took place in the way that it did. The main point is that this move was not a simple hermeneutic revival of some interesting Orthodox thinkers of the past. As such, this is not a question concerning the discovery of some unknown or little known manuscripts. Father Stăniloae and many other theologians accurately saw an urgent question, understanding with sharp consciousness that only by anchoring ourselves firmly in the already proved truth of the faith of the

Holy Fathers would we be able to navigate the troubled waters of the present and find a safe harbour in God in the future. In sum, only the firm soil of patristic-Palamite tradition offered Father Stăniloae the possibility of giving contemporary man answers to his problems, fighting from inside a living tradition that helps the theologian not only to say words, important as they may be, but just words nevertheless, and also to remember that “the saints are those who spoke about God in virtue of their personal experience” (Lemeni 2013, p.124).

We find the same statement in S. Totu, for whom “Father Stăniloae ‘knew’ that the world is shaken and did all he could for hesychasm to be known and lived by as many of his fellows as possible. Not coincidentally he ‘appealed’ first of all to Saint Gregory Palamas to remind all the believers what it means ‘to see God!’” It is then also this strong existential impact that is “targeted” by him, when stressing the great importance of the Palamite doctrine. At the same time, Totu adds, it could be said that his work on the *Philokalia* is not a mere translation “in the written pages of a book, but particularly in the pages of his life” (2015, p.30).

This point should be understood in the context of the fact that Father Stăniloae explicitly embraces a position according to which Orthodoxy, representing original Christianity, is essentially linked to one that actively responds to the spiritual needs of contemporary man. Orthodoxy is not then the expression of “the strong faith of the past”, valuable in and for itself, but of the eternal truth of life in God for all humans, from yesterday, today or tomorrow. For Father Stăniloae:

“Orthodoxy is identical in its faith and cult with those of the original Christianity. But, being in its essence the prolongation of the faith, the cult and the spirituality of the undivided from the very beginning of the Church, the paradoxical and absolutely authentic fact consists in that Orthodoxy perfectly responds to today’s spiritual needs of the peoples that kept it alive” (1970, p.730).

By so doing, Father Stăniloae, in my opinion, essentially echoes St Gregory’s position. The same “model” of “changes in the unchanging” that characterize being and the energies may also be found in the historical process that accompanies the being of Orthodoxy itself. For Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Orthodoxy:

“[has an intuition, which by] self-secularization it would completely lose the attention of the [contemporary] man, because this would not give him anymore the answers to the fundamental problems of salvation that

incessantly preoccupy him in the very core of his being. Of course, Orthodoxy adapted itself through times. [...] But this accommodation did not mean its essential change as a mystery or a replacement of its mystery with a certain ideology determined by a period or another. It has always remained the same mystery of the simple, fundamental and necessary data of the religious existence. But the mystery responds not only to these fundamental perennial needs, but also to all of the current life ones" (1970, p.731).

Let us now turn back to the Romanian context. I. Moldoveanu (2012), referring to the spirituality specific to the eighteenth century, emphasizes that "even in the absence of extensive translations of Palamite works, the Romanian monarchism [monasticism] moved in the direction traced by Saint Gregory Palamas in the 14th century". Father Stăniloae's work may be seen as a continuous effort to bring this Palamite succession to a full and also enriched consciousness of itself. The truth of St Gregory's texts should illuminate, in this particular context, the concrete space of Romanian Orthodox spirituality during its whole history. The Palamite doctrine was seen, then and now, as offering concrete support against the absolutization of the "lights of reason" specific to the eighteenth century and against the violent social and political mutations of the twentieth century.

d. The role of Father Stăniloae's work on Saint Gregory for the rediscovery of Palamite ideas in twentieth century Orthodoxy

The importance of Father Stăniloae's approach to Saint Gregory Palamas cannot be restricted to the Romanian spiritual space alone. In fact, he offered, with his 1938 study on Orthodoxy and the whole of Christianity the first extended monograph to use Palamite manuscripts, meeting thereby the requirements of a solid, modern study (Ică Jr. 2009, p.26). This aspect was acknowledged by John Meyendorff, who observed that Father Stăniloae was the first to directly quote Saint Gregory's unpublished works (Meyendorff 2009, cited in Portaru 2014, p.15). Meyendorff further adds that only "the dimensions of Father Stăniloae's work did not allow him to analyse in detail the thought of the hesychast scholar", but I presume that he is being here a little bit too optimistic or polite. To be honest, the standards of the so-called (strictly) scientific literature have rapidly evolved and tightened up since the time that Father Stăniloae published his monograph on Saint Gregory Palamas (for critical arguments on this see Henkel 2001). Beyond all doubt, his almost

personal, direct relation with Saint Gregory through his theology remains a real model for many of us, untouched by the passage of time.

It is well known that Father Stăniloae's study was preceded in 1911 by that of the Greek theologian Gregorios Papamichail (Petrópolis-Alexandria) and by at least two other significant studies: J. Sokolov (in 1913, St. Petersburg) and of K. Dyobuniotes (in 1924) (Moravcsik 1983, p.292; for a thorough record of early Palamite studies and translations, Ică Jr. 2009 is very useful). Quite obviously, there are substantial differences between these studies and that of Father Stăniloae, both in their aim and their hermeneutic tools. For example, Papamichail's monograph "was affected by a dogmatic position, and also by its author's deficient area of documentation", so it could be stated that, in fact, "the literary activity of Palamas was sketched [here] only on the basis of the published writings" (Ică Jr. 2009, p.19).

To sum up, this is the reason why it may be asserted that "the monograph from 1938 was and remains a pioneer edition in the context of Palamite studies". There are at least two reasons contributing to this conclusion: "i) all the hermeneutic labour was concentrated on the unpublished manuscripts, which were literally plucked from obscurity; ii) his approach intertwines amazingly well the historic exegesis with the doctrinal one, even if the latter prevails" (Trif 2011).

It was even stated, with a somewhat exalted tone, that his monograph from 1938 "begins a true renaissance of Palamite studies about hesychasm in our modern times" (Păcurariu 2002, p.50), or that "we owe [to this] the bringing back of [Saint] Gregory Palamas to the attention of the Orthodox world" (Gheorghiu 2002, p.108). We should not forget that Father Stăniloae's study was written in Romanian and this strongly affected its capacity, after publication, to become a milestone for this kind of research in a much broader context.

Again, it should be stressed that Father Stăniloae was not the only one delving into this area and its result should not be restricted to the recovery of a particular, though extremely important, theologian. Starting from Saint Gregory (but not only), the aim of many theologians of the last century was to build a comprehensive and concrete synthesis for the complex world in which they lived. As Andrew Louth aptly remarked once:

"If one looks at the Greek Fathers who are central to Fr. Dumitru—Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril, Denys, Maximos, Symeon, and Gregory Palamas—a familiar pattern emerges: for these are the Fathers central to the 'Neo-Patristic' synthesis that was so dear to Fr. Georges Florovsky, but was only sketched out in his mainly occasional writings,

the same Fathers to whom Vladimir Lossky had constant recourse, notably in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. This places Fr. Dumitru and his understanding of Orthodox theology among some of the Orthodox theologians whose names are most familiar in the West. He is not marginal, he is not even simply a bridge between East and West, or between Russian and Greek Orthodoxy: he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought" (2002, p.57).

Concluding Remarks

At the end of this analysis one might rightfully ask what the "true" benefit of such an endeavour is; one that identifies the deep connections between Saint Gregory and Father Dumitru Stăniloae.

I claim that, beyond important affinities of ideas and theoretical links that can be traced between the two theologians (easily identifiable on well-known historical facts), what is at stake here is the substance of Orthodox faith/life itself.

Speaking, for instance, about God's created and uncreated energies does not amount, neither for Saint Gregory nor for his Romanian "successor", to a subtle intellectual "description" of God's action in the world, but to a conceptual marking of the living framework of our relation with Him, showing us the possibilities and also the duties stemming from really being with Him. This picture also has what I might call a historical profile, which is not simply added; nor is it merely an interpretation of it, but constitutes its very essence. Orthodox truths are neither the effects of pure, "deep" intellectual analysis, nor visible expressions of breath-taking revelations of some exalted prayers. As all the Holy Fathers affirmed, such truths, as the ones of the synods, are answers revealed against the effective and powerful threats of the heresies, which find their "palpable" expression in the disruptive alterations of concrete, historical Christian life, such as those caused by/in modernity. They are, one might say, the answer of the truth to the offense of the untruth. This instills in them their "force", their capacity to be effective in individuals' lives and in the history of people.

In my opinion, this is exactly what motivated the activity of Father Dumitru Stăniloae and his special relationship with Palamite theology. This is, most likely, the profound meaning that enables us to place both of them among the Holy Fathers.

Thus, the retrieval of the Palamite writings by Father Dumitru Stăniloae (and by other important theologians) does not equate to a simple recovery of an important doctrine or the work of an exquisite theoretician

(which could be labelled “a remarkable acquisition”, like many others of this sort in the scientific landscape), but expresses a revival of Orthodox life itself in the twentieth century, as well as a corollary renewal of awareness of the depths of being Orthodox today.

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9. GREGORY PALAMAS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CATHOLIC TRADITION OF SOCIAL TEACHING

PROFESSOR JOHN FARINA

Abstract: Gregory Palamas' thought may provide insights into current debates about the role of Christian social teaching in political debates. This paper contrasts Palamas' thought with that of Jacques Maritain, as the basis for a comparison of the traditions and a fruitful exchange of ideas and intuitions about Christian social change.

Keywords: Palamas, Maritain, social change, Roman Catholic social teachings.

Daniel Honorius Hunter, writing in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1967 noted: "Palamas' insistence that the whole man is engraced, body and soul, and the stress that he placed on the whole of the body in prayer has been adopted in the West by recent theologians" (Hunter 1967, X: 872-74). Certainly, it is true that, as Kallistos Ware has suggested, the late twentieth century saw a revival of interest in Gregory (Kallistos Ware 1992, pp.394-414). Although Jacques Paul Migne included *The Triads* and several of Gregory's sermons in his *Patriologia Graeca* (1856-57), the English-speaking world did not have ready access to his writings. Thanks to the efforts of scholars like Ware, John Meyendorff, Nicholas Gendle, and Christopher Veniamin, familiarity with his writings has grown. But, to imply, as Hunter's statement seems to, that Gregory's ideas are commonplace in Latin theology, would be an overstatement. In fact, much of what Gregory held is still resisted; if not explicitly, then implicitly.

An example of this is the area that may be called "the church in society", "the person in society", or "Christian social teaching". It may be helpful at the start to say what I do not mean by this. James Anastasioi's 1987 article "The Social Teaching of St. Gregory Palamas", is an example of what I do not mean when speaking of social teaching. It presents a

rehearsal of comments made by Gregory in his sermons on the moral uses of money, the evils of usury, the advantages of poverty, and other moralisms (see Anastasioi 1987). Here, I am interested in something that might be better described as the role of the Church and the believer in the world. I am not concerned with personal ethics or moral prescriptions¹.

Here are the questions that interest me: What are the implications of Palamas' theology of *theosis* for understanding the role of the church in society? Does his approach offer something distinct from the Catholic perspective on the human person?

My contention is that Palamas does offer an alternative to the current social justice industry in western Christianity, which is dominated by Catholic social teaching. That body of thought is composed of various statements, most often encyclicals by twentieth and twenty-first century popes, ranging across issues such as the dignity of labour, the economy, international development, the world financial system, abortion, euthanasia, war and peace, and now even the environment.

At first glance, my whole project might sound confused. After all, matters of society and questions of justice all belong to the natural order. They are things we know through reason. We make prudential judgments about how to balance competing claims of rights, as well as what we should be doing as a society and what we should not be doing. It is purely a matter of reason; no revelation is required, no special graces beyond common sense. There would be no difference between east and west on that.

At second glance, however, things might not be so clear. Consider, for example, that contemporary Catholic social teaching rests on a foundation of Thomistic-Aristotelian assumptions, which, although updated, rely on scholastic assumptions, definitions, and distinctions. Consider further that that body of thought adds to its argument of Thomistic natural reason specific references to the Gospels and to Christian life. All this is done to make the point that the social doctrine is not simply one more social theory, but that it is *the* theory that flows from Christian revelation. That claim would not be remarkable, if it were limited to claims about the specifically theological elements of the teaching. What occurs, however, is that the philosophical and prudential

¹ For a discussion of the controversy over human rights and the Russian Orthodox Church occasioned by *The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights* (5 April 2010), see Sergey Trostyanskiy, "The Russian Orthodox Church on Human Rights", accessed 7 Nov. 2017 at <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8WW7T30>. See also the book of the same title by Kristina Staeckl (New York: Routledge, 2014).

parts of the teaching are sometimes amalgamated with the theological so that the results as a whole take on a normative character. As such, supporting universal healthcare, lenient policies towards illegal immigration, or the abolishment of capital punishment, for instance, might be presented as morally binding the believer as much as does the Gospel commandment: “love thy neighbour.” This same halo effect works to mean that the Thomistic-Aristotelian definitions of the common good, society, the individual, and the person are coloured with a theological hue, so they pass over from the realm of natural to revealed truths and as such make claims on the conscience of the believer that other notions of political philosophy would not.

An example of this is found in the work of the mid-twentieth-century French Catholic thinker, Jacques Maritain, who became famous for his application of Thomism to the philosophical and political issues of his day. His 1946 book, *The Person and the Common Good*, was an attempt at a moral reappraisal of society after the destruction of Europe for the second time in the century. He contrasted the Thomistic vision of the person in society with that of political philosophies based on a materialistic conception of the world and life². His method was to analyse the propositions of those philosophies and the sentiments and aspirations that lured people to them. He strove to present a Thomistic personalism at the centre of social doctrine. In an age gone mad in which political systems based on utilitarian and materialistic visions of the person dominated, he insisted that the value of the person be inviolable and that political decisions must always have human dignity as their focus. To his great credit, he succeeded, to some significant degree, in placing human dignity in the political spotlight, as his work on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights illustrates.

His contention that his Thomism was relevant to contemporary politics rested on a philosophy of natural law that aimed to be accessible to believers and nonbelievers alike. It would not depend on revealed truth, though it would not contradict it. What I wish to emphasize are not his premises, but the way he easily moves from them to moral conclusions about contemporary political realities.

For him, there were three main political systems and each in its own way was based on a wrong view of the human person: communism, fascism, which he calls “totalitarian or dictatorial anti-communism or anti-individualism”, and liberalism, which he insists on calling “bourgeois individualism”. Communism seeks to emancipate man as the God of

² All quotations are from the English edition: Maritain 1966.

history. It begins as a desperate protest against the dehumanization of man, but the person it strives to liberate is the person in the group. It cannot liberate the individual. In the Marxist utopia, the political state is abolished and society, as the economic community, subordinates the whole life of the person to itself; there is no room for transcendence.

Fascism seeks to incorporate man into a social whole made up of material individuals, rather than true persons. In the name of the state or the people or race, it attempts to build a society; but the people become aware of themselves mainly through a powerful leader that they imbue with special characteristics. The individual person who opposes it is the enemy, not the object of society.

Bourgeois liberalism tries to ground everything on the unchecked initiative of the individual, who acts like a little god. It presumes the absolute liberty of labour, property, and contract. For Maritain, this is awful because it is based on the giving up of individual freedoms to the general will, as Rousseau said, and will result in the General's will, that is, in tyranny. The individual's freedom is only illusory. He is pacified by the satisfaction of his many appetites, even as he is further isolated from others.

Of all of these, Maritain was most critical of the last. Surprisingly, he could not begin to understand liberalism and democratic capitalism. So, he characterized it as open to Christianity on its face, but in fact atheistic. His treatment reads like Beaumont's critique of Rousseau's *Emile*, and just like that work, it misunderstands freedom and can only see a society based in individual freedoms as a distortion of the person and an abandonment of any conception of the common good. The idea that the common good is best achieved by limiting the power of government, by allowing individuals to each seek their own good through localism and through the chaotic mechanisms of the unfettered market never crosses his mind. Yet he attributes to communists pure motives, in fact, in a bizarre but revealing passage, he calls Marxism "a Christian heresy, the ultimate and altogether radical Christian heresy" (Maritain 1966, p.98). Communism is, for him, a kind of righteous indignation; an understandable reaction to the injustices of liberalism, which simply forgot to include the whole person and focused only on the material, horizontal dimensions of man.

The greater social distortions for Maritain are liberalism and fascism: "The relation of the individual to society must not be conceived after the atomistic and mechanistic pattern of bourgeois individualism which destroys the organic social totality, or after the biological and animal patterns of the statist or racist totalitarian conception which swallows up the person" (Maritain 1966, p.98).

One could hardly object to Maritain's main point that a society that exists to make better humanity must recognize the spiritual and eternal in human nature as well as the material. His achievement in its time was significant. But has this natural law approach led to the current tendency to expand analysis to the structural elements of society distorting the true obligation of the Church to restore the world? Has the social teaching become absorbed with the material dimensions of economics, public policy, and science so that the Church is merely another NGO, or one more voice in the crowd calling for social change?

Maritain's concern was the reconstruction of society on the proper laws of its own nature. What are those laws? Maritain believed that they were knowable as a product of natural law. Here he followed completely St Thomas, who described natural law as the human person's participation through reason in the divine law. Before Maritain ever gets to his discussion of liberalism, communism, and fascism, he devotes the bulk of his book to three chapters. The first introduces, at length, the positions of St Thomas on the ordination of the person to its ultimate end. The second is a long presentation of the distinction between individuality and personality in Thomism. And the third is an equally-detailed account of St Thomas' view of the person in society. All those definitions of the person, society, and the final purpose of society are presented, as if they were all just given in the nature of things, by God, the creator of all things. They all seem to equate "society" with the political state. As such, there is no sense of the conflict between the ideal Christian society and the state that might not be ruled by a pre-Hobbesian ruler, working alongside the church for the common good.

This is, of course, the problem with natural law solutions to actual problems. They are theoretical and abstract and cannot easily be applied to concrete situations in a way that elicits broad agreement. A philosopher king, like Maritain, might get it, but few of the rest of us do. What appears more obvious in Maritain's analysis of the contemporary situation are his own prejudices and preferences. Instead of stating those and defending them, he says they are plainly inferred from the natural law. This type of thing is precisely what led to the abandonment of natural law thinking in civil law at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a problem today in Catholic social teaching and in the related area of the application of "human rights" to public policy. Just what these rights are is not always easily understood. To ground them in something more than positive law, which is a primary contention of the human rights movement, opens up all the problems evident in Maritain's efforts to derive ideas about political theory from Thomistic philosophy. What happens when

these human rights, by implication sacred and inviolable, conflict? Is there a “human right” for a child to change her religion to one different from her father’s? Is there a human right for migrants to be welcomed in foreign lands? Is there a human right for gays to marry one another? Do women have a human right to contraception? Do future generations have a human right to lower carbon emissions? If human rights are grounded in the natural order of things, do Christians have any choice but to support such rights, even if they appear to contradict scripture and tradition?

This is where I would like to bring in Gregory and ask whether his conception of the person provides an explicitly Christian theological basis for a social vision.

At a moment in the fourteenth century, when Latin theology had become increasingly abstract and reliant on scholastic thought with its rigid legalisms and its claims to comprehensiveness, systematization and sufficiency, Palamas insisted on a distinction between philosophy and theology: philosophy does not save us, he famously said at the beginning of *The Triads* (Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, 1.1. The First Question, Meyendorff 1983, p.25).

The controversy between Gregory and Barlaam, well illustrates this. Barlaam claimed that theology and the classical philosophy of the Greeks had the same aim and had arrived at the same truth, something that the apostles received immediately, but that was accessible to pagan Greeks through the mediation of philosophy. The Greek philosophers had been enlightened by God, something made clear by the Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Celestial Hierarchies*. They understood divine transcendence. Gregory’s reaction to hearing those arguments was much like mine in reading Maritain: “I was in no way convinced, when I heard such things put forward, for my small experience of monastic life showed me that just the opposite was the case” (Meyendorff 1983, p.25).

Palamas rejected this effort to narrow the gap between natural and revealed truth. Philosophy may offer some access to what is true and good, but in a remote and inchoate manner. Used rightly it can lead to a knowledge of the natural world. But those like Barlaam claim much more: “Because all the inner principles of all created things reside in the divine mind, and the images of those principles exist in our soul, we can know them by the use of the methods of distinction, syllogistic reasoning and analysis” (Meyendorff 1983, p.28). Gregory, in resisting this, stressed that believers share not merely a knowledge (*gnosis*) of God, but a union with God (*henosis*) (Meyendorff 1983, pp.31-33). He said there was a “knowledge common to all those who have believed in Christ beyond all thought” (Meyendorff 1983, p.66).

For Gregory, the events that constitute our redemption were facts, not psychological insights or levels of awareness. So, Peter, James, and John, in fact, saw the divine light on Mt. Tabor, nothing less. The goal of contemplation was the vision of God, not in his essence, but in his energies. *Apophysis*, or negative theology, was not required simply because of the inability of humans to understand God. It was a consequence of God's transcendence. God, "is not only beyond our knowing, but beyond unknowing as well" (Triads, 1.iii. 4; Meyendorff 1983, p.32). Beyond the words of negative theology was a reality of union with God. Gregory wished to clearly distinguish *apophysis* from the unknowing of the Platonists, who relied on intermediaries, such as *logos*, to bring the meaning of God. He insisted that God, through his divine energies, made available to believers through Christ, revealed himself to us. Paul was ravished at the moment of encountering the invisible and supracelestial visions in Christ and became supracelestial himself, without needing to actually ascend beyond the heavens. Gregory says: "This ravishment denotes a mystery of an entirely different order, known only to those who have experienced it" (Triads 1.iii. 16; Meyendorff 1983, p.34).

What Gregory finds remarkable is that those who so experience divine knowing, do not themselves understand how: "Those who see do not know in fact the one that makes them able to see ... for the Spirit by whom they see is itself incomprehensible". All the intellectual activity has stopped. Yet, beyond this unknowing is, Gregory reminds us, what Dionysius called "a dazzling darkness", in which those blessed souls unite themselves to the transcendent. It is not by *askesis* and following the negative way that they attain that union. But it is the action of God, who performs it through divine energies.

While he affirmed the ability of persons to become partakers of the divine nature, he, nevertheless, laboured to preserve the transcendence and ineffability of God. Persons partook of the divine energies, which were God himself, not simply intermediaries or constructions. Christians could experience the Taboric light, which was not merely a metaphor for psychological insight, but an experience of God himself. Truly, as St Athanasius said, "God became man so that man might become God". God is not limited by his transcendent essence, but is fully and personally existing *ad extra* in his energies. But, to preserve the pure being and unity of God, Palamas, following the Cappadocian fathers, speaks of God's essence. This is always beyond our knowing; beyond our experiencing. God's absolute transcendence is thus preserved.

In the West, by contrast, especially in Protestantism, believers are said to participate in Christ by sharing in his righteousness, which is

attributed to them through the act of redemption. They become justified and atonement occurs through this juridical process in which the righteous victim Jesus is substituted for the guilty sinners. The emphasis is not so much on Incarnation as on the crucifixion as the primary event in the act of redemption. Propitiation, satisfaction, victimhood, and sacrifice have a more prominent place than fellowship, participation, friendship, restoration, and divinization³.

By insisting that the divine energy was real, uncreated divinity, not simply a God-given mechanism of grace, or a figure of speech to enable human understanding, Palamas emphasized the real dynamic presence of God, and the ongoing, existential quality of the process of redemption. It was never thought of in the legalistic way that either attributed salvation to our level of sanctifying grace, as Catholics would claim, or to a one time choice for Christ, as Evangelical Protestants would proclaim, but as an act of gazing, of beholding his glory, of basking in his presence, of *theosis*.

“Be still and know that I am God,” the psalmist tells us (Psalms 46:10). *Hesychia*, stillness, the quiet of the heart, is not a term original to Gregory’s thought, but one that has become its hallmark. He talked about how we should come to experience this state of being quiet through a practice that involves attending to our breathing and reciting the Jesus Prayer. Our bodies are part of ourselves. It is not simply enough to dwell on the theory of *theosis*, we have to experience it. To help us experience it, we have to train the body. By reciting the prayer, we focus our attention. We become listeners as we hear ourselves say over and over again: “Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me”. The mind needs to be stilled, not to become numb (*analgesia*) to feeling, but to attain a state of impassibility (*apatheia*).

What might be the implications of this embodied experience of God for society? Gregory followed earlier Eastern fathers in believing that sin and the Fall meant the disintegration of humanity and of the created order. Redemption involved not only the re-integration of the person, but also of all of creation. All of creation groans and travails awaiting the manifestation of the children of God (Romans 8:19-21). Writers, like Maximus the Confessor, thought that reconciliation had five elements, which he referred to as mediations: between male and female, paradise and earth, heaven and earth, sensible and intelligible creation, and God and the whole of creation. This last mediation was to involve ecstasy and a

³ There are limits to generalizations like these, as A. N. Williams illustrates by comparing Aquinas and Gregory (see Williams 1999).

mystical union between God and man. Through the experience of mystical union with God, God becomes all in all, bringing all things to fulfilment around mankind fully restored into the image of God.

Paul spoke of these reconciliations in Galatians 3:28, and again in Colossians 3:11. The process is ongoing until Christ has become all in all. As Paul tells us, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all in all” (Colossians. 3:11). This reality is already, but not yet, a realized *eschaton* that we yet hope for.

Gregory insists that the restoration of society and the full development of the human person in society are finally brought about through the action of God; just as knowledge of heavenly things is a work of God, which we must experience, rather than simply deduce by means of syllogistic reasoning. It is not enough for Christians like Maritain to rely on their definitions of the person, society, and the common good. Nor is it enough to work for justice, as many of the Marxist inspired justice theologies of today would insist. For God is in the end, all in all. This insistence on the divine presence and prerogatives sets the East apart from the West.

We receive a further indication of Gregory’s thought from Nicholas Kavalas, who interpreted his thought as a corrective to the new humanism of the fourteenth century. As Panayiotis Nellas describes Kavalas:

“He showed plainly that the created is made to be united with the uncreated God, and that it can do so, provided that it continues until death wholly to deny the autonomy that constitutes the kernel of sin and productive cause of sin. [...] He showed that the whole of creation, and in particular, all the forms and functions of life can, when their autonomy is denied, be united through the sacraments with God” (Nellas 1997, p.150).

This “theoandric” theology seems to radically deny the need for a mediating language, whereby the social ethics of Christians are conveyed to civil society. Does this mean only Christians can run society? Does it mean we must have a Christian ruler? Is *symphonia* the only model of Church-state relations that works in a system that gives humans such a destiny? In other words, does this all suppose a Christian ruler who shares the same values?

Palamas is not against reason or the accessibility of moral truths through reason. Of course, in his contest with Barlaam, he is talking about revealed truth, not natural truth. Reason is sufficient for knowing natural

truth. His most famous teaching, however, contextualized this differently than would be done in the west. There, mystical experience is an incidental, and, ultimately, unnecessary gift of God, which does not attain the true vision of God, something no one can enjoy until the next life. Those who might experience it are not holier than those who do not. In fact, most of the time, such things are fraught with difficulties and generally should be avoided, and certainly never sought. So, we are left with a different kind of participation in God than in the Palamite tradition, one that relies more on the intermediaries of sanctifying grace (something that is a divine aid, but not a direct participation in divinity) and reason, which is a gift of God, given to all rational creatures. If our experience of the true God is thus circumscribed, then it means our reliance on reason increases. And a system that does its utmost to make reasonable the entire corpus of Christian theology becomes indispensable.

Another way of conceiving of this is to reference the achievement of Gregory as an apophatic theologian. His project was to break with and transcend the closed ontological conception of truth of the Greeks, which had found its way into Christian theology from the time of Origen. As John Zizioulas notes: “Apophaticism rejects the Greek view of truth, emphasizing that what we know about being—about creation—must not be ontologically identified with God”. And then, quoting Maximus he says: “God has a simple, unknowable existence, inaccessible to all things and completely unexplainable, for he is beyond affirmation and negation” (Zizioulas 1993, p.90). But, this does not leave us with a mysterious, fickle deity, because God reaches out of himself in love. *Ekstasis* is another way to understand the essence/energies distinction. God reaches out in love, not by nature or essence. Truth is not a matter of correspondence with being, but of *koinoneia*.

Thinking of our social responsibility as sharers in the divine nature, who are involved in the process by which God in his ecstatic love reaches out to restore creation, offers, I would suggest, a rich soil in which to grow our social doctrine. One that stresses existential participation over static theory and love over justice. One that frees the Church to be the Church and not pose as public policy analyst, economist, or climatologist. We need simply to act in such a way that the world says: “See how they love one another”. Isn’t that the unique contribution of religion? Change ourselves, or rather be changed by Christ, and, in that act, God restores the world.

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10. THE RELATIONSHIP OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS' THEOLOGY OF TRANSFIGURATION AND THE HESYCHAST ICONOGRAPHY OF THE 14TH-16TH C.

DR. SPYRIDON P. PANAGOPOULOS

Abstract: In this work, I examine the influence of St Gregory Palamas' hesychastic theology on the iconography of the Cretan School, and especially of Theophanes. I examine the theological background of the icon of Transfiguration, as it is expressed in the *Homilies* and other theological works of St Gregory Palamas. I also compare and contrast this icon with the other famous icons of Theophanes: Resurrection, Ascension, and the Dormition of the Mother of God. Hesychastic iconography is definitely a characteristic and dynamic form of art and worship that is unique and intrinsically connected to the Orthodox Church.

Keywords: Theophanes, Cretan School of Iconography, hesychastic iconography, St Gregory Palamas.

Transfiguration became one of the main topics of Saint Gregory Palamas' theology or Christology because of the polemics concerning the origin and the characteristics of the light that the Lord revealed on Mount Tabor; through him, this specific Christology was transferred to the Byzantine iconography of the hesychastic period and became the symbol of hesychasm. Saint Gregory referred to the event of the revelation of the Holy Trinity at Mt Tabor in many of his works, but a special mention was made in his *Triads*. However, I find that Saint Gregory's two homilies on this specific feast, are particularly clear regarding his intentions, so these two homilies will be the core of my investigation. My paper will be divided into two parts: a) the theology of the Transfiguration of Saint Gregory Palamas and b) the relation of the theology of the Transfiguration of Saint Gregory with the hesychastic

iconography of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

A) The Theology of the Transfiguration of Saint Gregory Palamas

The first thing with which Saint Gregory begins his commentary of this evangelical event is the words of Christ that He said before ascending Mount Tabor and with which we can see the essence of the event and the reality which was revealed to his disciples in Him and by Him. Six days before ascending Mount Tabor and immediately after the announcement by Saint Peter about Christ as the Son of living God and the first announcements on Christ's Passion, Christ says: "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:27-28). Saint Gregory interprets what Christ calls, "the Light of His Transfiguration as the glory of His Father and His Kingdom" (*Homily 34, 3*: "Δόξαν τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ βασιλείαν ἐαυτοῦ καλῶν τὸ φῶς τῆς οἰκείας μεταμορφώσεως").

Subsequently in his *Homily*, St Gregory Palamas explains the difference between the two evangelists who referred to the event: the first one says that the Transfiguration took place six days and the second one eight days after the previous event, and he explains why there is this discrepancy: "Because the great miracle of the Light of the Lord's Transfiguration, is the mystery of the eighth day of the future century, after the cessation of the creation of the universe in six days" (*Homily 34, 6*: "Διότι τὸ μέγα θέαμα τοῦ φωτὸς τῆς τοῦ Κυρίου μεταμορφώσεως, τῆς ὀγδόης ἡτοι τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος ἐστὶ τὸ μυστήριον, μετὰ τὴν κατάπαυσιν τοῦ ἐν ἑξ ἡμέραις γεγονότος κόσμου"). About the words of the Evangelist Mark, regarding the revelation of Christ: "[...] there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present itself with power" (Mark 9:1). Saint Gregory explains that the phrase "with power" is regarding "the power of the Divine Spirit, through which the Kingdom of God is revealed to the worthy" (*Homily 34, 6*: "Τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος δύναμιν, δι' ἧς ὁράται τοῖς ἀξίοις ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ βασιλεία"). He adds: "The King of the universe is everywhere, and his Kingdom exists everywhere. When his Kingdom is going to come, this does not mean that ἄλλοθεν becomes ἀλλαχόσε, but this Kingdom is revealed with the power of the Divine Spirit" (*Homily 34, 7*: "Πανταχοῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τοῦ παντὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ πανταχοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, ὥστε τὸ ἐρχεσθαι τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν, οὐ τὸ ἄλλοθεν ἀλλαχόσε παραγίνεσθαι δηλοῖ, ἀλλὰ τὸ

φανεροῦσθαι ταύτῃ τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ θείου Πνεύματος”). At another point, Saint Gregory says that the apostles “saw on Mount Tabor the Kingdom of God, this Divine and Secret Light, which the Saints Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil the Great called God, saying that this Light was God whom the disciples saw on the mountain” (*Physical Chapters* 146, ed. by P. Chrestou, *Συγγράμματα*, p.116: “Εἶδον, κατὰ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ Σωτῆρος, τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸ θεῖκόν ἐκεῖνο καὶ ἀπόρρητον φῶς ὃ Γρηγόριος μὲν καὶ Βασίλειος οἱ μεγάλοι θεότητα προσαγορεύουσι, ‘φῶς’ λέγοντες ‘ἢ παραδειχθεῖσα θεότης ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τοῖς μαθηταῖς’, καὶ ‘κάλλος’ τοῦ ὄντως δυνατοῦ ‘ἢ νοητὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ θεωρητὴ θεότης”).

As such, according to Saint Gregory, the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed through Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor; and because this Kingdom is the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, this event has the same character of God's Epiphany as the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan (Lossky 1960, pp.172-173). The Son showed the glory of His royal garments with which he was anointed during his baptism and God the Father appeared spoke, saying: “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matthew 17:5). The Holy Spirit appears here, not as in the case of the baptism, where it appeared in the form of a dove, but as a cloud through which the voice of the Father comes forth. Having in our mind that on Mount Tabor we have a revelation of the glory of Christ, which is also the glory of the Holy Trinity, Transfiguration is likened to Resurrection, to Ascension and to the Second Coming. The above was revealed also by the Lord Himself, connecting the appearance of the Son of Man on Mount Tabor with the coming of the Son of Man in the “glory of His Father with His angels” (Matthew 16:27). Fr John Meyendorff notes the eschatological dimension of the Taborian light, suggesting that the patristic tradition interprets evangelical preaching about the Transfiguration as a foretaste of Christ's Second Coming (Meyendorff 1976, p.144).

St Gregory Palamas, in *Homily* 34, asks the question “Who was transfigured?” (“Τίς ἐστι μετεμορφώθη”) and, subsequently, he explains that Christ is only Light and nothing else (*Homily* 34, 10: “τοῖς γὰρ ἀϊδίοις αὐτός ἐστι φῶς καὶ οὐκ ἄλλο”) and that He was not the one who received that glory, that splendour, and that light on Mount Tabor. He who claims that during the Transfiguration, Christ received that Light on Mount Tabor: “τρεῖς φύσεις ἐπὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ δοξάζει, τὴν τε θεῖαν καὶ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην, καὶ τὴν τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου” (*Homily* 34, 13), St Gregory stresses especially: “τοιγαροὺν οὐχ ἕτερον, ἀλλ’ ἦν εἶχεν ἀφανῶς λαμπρότητα ταύτην ἐφάνερωσεν” (*Homily* 34, 13). Appealing to his predecessors, St Gregory adds: “ἐπεὶ καὶ μετεμορφώθη Χριστὸς κατὰ τοὺς

θεολόγους, οὐχ ὃ οὐκ ἦν προσλαβόμενος, οὐδὲ εἰς ὃπερ οὐκ ἦν μεταβαλλόμενος, ἀλλ' ὃπερ ἦν τοῖς οἰκείοις μαθηταῖς ἐκφαινόμενος, διανοίγων τοῦτων τὰ ὄμματα καὶ ἐκ τυφλῶν ἐργαζόμενος βλέποντας" (Homily 34, 13). So, the Transfiguration of Christ is in the way that on Mount Tabor He showed that glory upon which he uninterruptedly resides. This glory is the glory of His deified body, which is why that glory occupied the senses of the apostles. Because "πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο τυφλοὶ εἰσιν οἱ κατὰ φύσιν ὁρῶντες ὀφθαλμοῖ" (Homily 34, 13), Christ transfigured the sense of the eyesight of His Apostles, making them see with their physical eyes the spiritual, uncreated, divine light: "Ἐνηλλάγησαν οὖν, καὶ οὕτω τὴν ἐναλλαγὴν εἶδον, οὐχ ἦν ἀρίως, ἀλλ' ἦν ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς προσλήψεως ἔλαβε τὸ ἡμέτερον φῶς, θεωθὲν τῇ ἐνώσει τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ" (Homily 34, p.14·1 Radović 1973, pp.74-75).

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos can help us understand better what occurred on Mount Tabor with the Holy Apostles through his discussion of a similar event with the prophet Moses on Mount Choreb. According to Hierotheos, when Moses entered the Divine Darkness and his body was changed ("ἡλλοιώθη"), he did not "act" ("ἐνήργησε") out the Transfiguration, but he "participated" ("ἔπαθε") in the Transfiguration. This means that Moses reached the view of the Divine Light and lived *theosis* by God's grace; and this Light was not Moses' physical ability (Vlachos 1996, p.343). Moses' body was not the source of uncreated Grace, as happened in the case of Christ at Mt Tabor.

St Gregory Palamas interprets the fact that Christ was transfigured while praying, saying that Christ did not have the necessity to pray, but He prayed so that he showed his disciples how to approach God ("ἵνα δείξῃ πρόξενον οὖσαν τὴν προσευχὴν τῆς μακαρίας ἐκείνης θεας, καὶ μάθωμεν, ὅτι διὰ τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐγγύτητος καὶ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν κατὰ νοὺν ἐνώσεως, ἡ λαμπρότης ἐγγίνεται καὶ ἀναφαίνεται ἐκείνη, πᾶσι διδομένη τε καὶ ὁρωμένη τοῖς δι' ἀγαθοεργίας ἀκριβοῦς καὶ διὰ προσευχῆς εἰλικρινοῦς ἀνατεινόμενοις ἀδιαλείπτως πρὸς Θεόν"; Homily 34, 10).

With the above words, St Gregory points out all the elements of the essence of Christ's Transfiguration: firstly, the confession of the Apostle Peter about Christ as the Son of God is confirmed, which preceded the Transfiguration on Tabor; subsequently, he shows the Kingdom of God through the manifestation of God's lightened garments and through the appearance of the Holy Trinity. Christ shows, also, to His disciples that the acquisition of the Kingdom of God is the goal of man's creation and that labor, which is expressed by ascending Mount Tabor, and prayer are the means for the acquisition of this Kingdom. St Gregory says that Christ: "ὅθεν τοῖς ἀγίοις ἡ λαμπρότης τοῦ Θεοῦ προσγενήσεται καὶ

ὁπως αὐτοῖς ὀφθῆσεται ὑπερδεῖκνυ· λάμπουσι γὰρ καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι ὡς ἥλιος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς αὐτῶν, καὶ οὕτω φῶς ὅλοι γεγονότες θεῖον, ὡς θεῖον φωτὸς γεννήματα, τὸν θεῖως ἀπορρήτως ὑπερλάμποντα ὁμονται Χριστόν, οὐ ἐκ τῆς θεότητος ἢ δόξα φυσικῶς προϊοῦσα κοινὴ καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἐν Θαβὼρ ἐδεῖκνυτο, διὰ τὸ ἐνιαίον τῆς ὑποστάσεως” (Homily 34, 11). Then the Saints, “καὶ φῶς ἔσονται καὶ φῶς ὁμονται, τὸ μόνης τῆς κεκαθαρμένης καρδίας ἐπίχαρι καὶ πανίερρον θέαμα, ὃ νῦν μὲν καὶ τοῖς τὰ ἐναγῇ πάντα δι’ ἀπαθείας καὶ τὰ καθαρὰ διὰ τῆς εἰλικρινοῦς καὶ ἄλλου διαβεβηκόσι προσευχῆς ἐν ἀρραβῶνος μέρει μετρίως προφαίνεται, τότε δὲ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐμφανῶς θεοποιήσει, συνδιαιωνίζοντας καὶ συνδοξαζομένους τῷ μεταδόντι τῇ καθ’ ἡμᾶς φύσει θείας δόξης τε καὶ λαμπρότητος” (Triads 2, 33, 66; Chrestou ed., *Συγγράμματα*, Vol. A’, p.599). The Holy Trinity has this Light, this glory and this Kingdom by nature; angels and humans receive this with grace: “οἱ δὲ ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι τε καὶ ἄνθρωποι χάριτι ταύτην εὐμοιροῦσι, ἐκεῖθεν δεχόμενοι τὴν ἔλλαμψιν” (Homily 35, 15).

At the end of each homily, Saint Gregory stresses that man can participate in this Light, via an uncreated divine action; but man cannot participate in the divine essence: “*βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν καὶ λαμπρότητα καὶ φῶς ἀπόρητον καὶ χάριν θεῖαν, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐσίαν ὁρᾶν καὶ κοινωνεῖν τοὺς ἁγίους πιστεύοντες, ὡς ἐδιδάχθημεν*” (Homily 35, 17). He invites his faithful flock of Thessalonica to contemplate and believe in the event of the Transfiguration, putting aside their earthly pursuits and their thoughts about the flesh: “*Θεώμεθα τοιγαροῦν τοῖς ἔνδον ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸ μέγα θέαμα τοῦτο, τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν, ἄλλω συνδιαιωνίζουσαν θεότητος πυρί· καὶ τοὺς δερματίνους χιτῶνας οὐκ ἐκ παραβάσεως ἐνδεδύμεθα, τὰ γεώδη καὶ σαρκικὰ φρονήματα ἀποθέμενοι, στῶμεν ἐν γῇ ἁγία, τὴν καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἕκαστος γῆν ἁγίαν δι’ ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν ἀνατάσεως ἀποδείξαντες, ὡς ἂν παρρησίαν σχῶμεν ἐπιδημοῦντος ἐν φωτὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ φωτισθῶμεν προσδραμόντες, καὶ συνδιαιωνίσωμεν φωτιζόμενοι εἰς δόξαν τῆς τρισηλίου καὶ μοναρχικωτάτης φαιδρότητος· νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν*” (Homily 35, 18).

B) The relation of St Gregory Palamas' theology of Transfiguration and the iconography of the 14th-16th centuries

As a direct effect of St Gregory's involvement, and that of other hesychasts, in the topic of the Lord's Transfiguration, we can refer to the fact that during the period of the triumph of the hesychastic movement, a considerable number of monasteries were consecrated to that feast. On

Mount Athos we have the renovated Monastery of the Pantocrator (along with the Monastery of Koutloumousion and the chapel on top of Athos); in Thessalonica we have the Monastery of Vlatadon and the Great Meteoron Monastery in Thessaly.

We suppose that it is no coincidence that the icon of the Transfiguration, which Theophanes painted for the festival circle of the Stavronikita Monastery's iconostasis, constitutes almost a reproduction from the manuscript with the theological oeuvre by the Byzantine emperor, John VI Kantakouzenos, between the years 1371 and 1375. (Andreopoulos 2005, p.225).



Transfiguration; Theophanes the Cretan, Stavronikita monastery, 1546.

Everything coincides: Christ's figure; the crossing-form nimbus (halo) and the rays that spring from this; then the figures of Moses and Elijah and the bright rocks where they are standing; the body posture and the gestures of the apostles. The only difference lies in the colours. In the Icon of the Transfiguration, the rocks where Moses and Elijah stand become bridges leading from earth to heaven. According to Professor Fr A. Andreopoulos, Mount Tabor is presented as unusual and inaccessible. It constitutes the peak of all the ascetic ascensions, of all the Old Testament mountains, so that the depiction of three different mountain tops, one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elijah, means that all the previous ascetics lead only to Christ, i.e., to an increase in the mountains. Every Christian has his/her own procession of ascension; his/her personal mission. Thus, this icon stresses that the nature of the Church, *inter alia*, consists of both common and personal labour and prayer. Considering that the Byzantine miniature constitutes one of the first hagiographic answers to the new hesychastic spirituality and theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, it is understood that Theophanes chose this miniature as an exemplar for the iconostasis of the Athonite monastery.

Considering all the words of St Gregory, the hagiographer of the hesychasm's period wished, with the depiction of the highness and the magnificence of Christ's standing figure and the apostles falling down prone, to stress both the highness of the anthropic hypostasis of God's Son and the depth of the fall of the human nature. It is the same depth and darkness of the fall due to which Saint Gregory for many years preached on Mount Athos: "*Κύριε, φώτισόν μου τὸ σκότος*" (Lord, lighten my darkness). Elsewhere, St Gregory speaks about how during the vision of the Uncreated Light, one who prays, during praying, is facing the nothingness of one who prays: "*τῆς δ' εαυτοῦ πρὸς φωτοληψίαν ἐπιτηδειότητος ἐπὶ μᾶλλον ὁρᾷ τὸ ἀδρανές*" (*Triads* 1, 3, 22; Chrestou ed., *Συγγράμματα*, Vol. A', p.433). The Transfiguration icon of this period was a testimony of the illumination of Saint Gregory's mind and the importance of the entire hesychastic movement: "*Τὸ πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἐνώσει τῆς οἰκειᾶς χάριτος Θεὸν καθίστησι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ὅτε νέφ' ἐκ χοῶς πλαττομένῳ πνεῦμα ζωῆς ἐνεφύσησε, καὶ τοῦ κρείττονος μεταδέδωκε, καὶ εἰκόνι οἰκεῖα καὶ ὁμοιώσει τετίμηκε, καὶ τῆς Ἑδέμ πολίτην εἰργάσατο, καὶ ἀγγέλων ἐποίησε σύντροφον· ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τῆς θείας εἰκόνης τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῇ τῶν παθῶν ἰλὺϊ ἐξοφώσαμέν τε καὶ συνεχέαμεν, δευτέραν κοινωνίαν ὁ συμπαθῆς ἡμῖν κεκοινωνήκε, πολὺ τῆς προτέρας ἀσφαλεστέραν καὶ τε καὶ παραδοξότεραν. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐν ὑπεροχῇ μένων τῆς οἰκειᾶς θεότητος, μεταλαμβάνει τοῦ χείρονος, ἐν αὐτῷ θεουργῶν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, καὶ τῇ εἰκόνι τὸ ἀρχέτυπον μίγνυται, καὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον κάλλος ἐν ταύτῃ παραδείκνυσι*

σήμερον. Καὶ λάμπει μὲν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος· φωτὶ γὰρ ἄλλω ταυτίζεται καθ' ὑπόστασιν" (Λόγος εἰς Μεταμόρφωσιν, 4, PG 96, 552 B.C.). According to L. Ouspensky, the movements of the body and of the hand of the apostles witness the intensity of divine power, which shines through the transfigured body of Christ. Moreover, the Transfiguration icon stresses that the encounter of God and man is possible only via Jesus Christ's anthropic hypostasis on the mountain top, as the furthest limit of the ascension from earth to heaven, i.e., the symbol of the labours that precede God's vision through Christ's Transfiguration, by which man himself is transfigured, and only man is transfigured and unified with God. We must stress that with Christ's Transfiguration, along with the transfigured apostles, the whole of creation is also transfigured.

To understand the theological meaning of the icon of Transfiguration, we can also refer to the icon of Christ Himself, because the way the Saviour has been depicted is compatible with the words of the Gospel: "*His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light*" (Matthew 17:2). Christ's face in the icons of the hesychastic period shines like the sun. The painter achieves this result with the reinforcement of the shining of the light in the center with the aid of the dark shadows on the edges of the face. Luke the Evangelist says: "*As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening*" (Luke 9:29). From the above passage, we are informed that Christ's Transfiguration occurs during His prayer. The figure of Christ, as it is found in the hesychastic icons, approximates to the wording of the Gospel, being profound and showing a mystical Christ praying. In relation to this iconographic "type" of Christ's figure, we can say that it presents distinctive characteristics of the Saviour. We can see a similarity to the iconographic type of "*Χριστὸς βασιλεύς*" (Christ the King) by Manuel Panselenos, as he sits on his throne; while the older iconographic types belong to the iconographic type of the Pantocrator (All-Mighty), the Pantepoptes (All-Seeing) of the world, Who from the celestial heights of the Church's dome, observes and keeps through His observation and His actions the world in order. The same occurs with the faces of the saints on Byzantine icons of this period, which shine like the sun, because they are lightened by the Sun of Justice. This phenomenon is confirmed by the words of St Gregory himself: "*Καὶ γὰρ ἄλλους ἡλίους καὶ αὐτοὺς ποιεῖ, οἷς ἂν ὁ ἥλιος οὕτως ἐμφανῶς ἐπιλάμψῃ· «κάμψουσι γὰρ καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς αὐτῶν»"*" (Homily 35, 3).

However, in the commentary of St Gregory on God's epiphany on Mount Tabor, we have the explanation of the shadow on the edges of Christ's face. St Gregory describes the cloud that covered the peak of

Tabor and from within which the voice of the Father was heard with the following words: “Μὴ αὐτὴ τὸ ἀπρόσιτον ἐστὶ φῶς, ἐν ᾧ ὁ Θεὸς κατοικεῖ, καὶ ὁ φῶς ἀναβάλλεται ὡς ἱμάτιον; Ὁ τιθεῖς γάρ, φησί, ‘νέφη τὴν ἐπίβασιν αὐτοῦ’, καὶ ἔθετο σκότος ἀποκρυφὴν αὐτοῦ, κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ ἡ σκηνὴ αὐτοῦ’. Καίτοι, καθὰ φησιν ὁ ἀπόστολος, ‘μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασίαν, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον’ ὥστε τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ φῶς ἐστὶν ἐνταυθοῖ καὶ σκότος, δι’ ὑπερέχουσιν φανότῃ ἐπισκιάζον” (Homily 35, 9). The darkness on the edges of Christ’s face in the hesychastic icons is the inaccessible light, which Dionysius the Areopagite, as St Gregory stresses, calls “τὸ ἀπρόσιτον φῶς, ἐν ᾧ κατοικεῖ ὁ Θεός” (Homily 35, 10; Terezis 1995, pp.271-272).

Proceeding with his commentary on the Transfiguration, St Gregory Palamas discusses with particular emphasis the decoration of Christ’s garments and their folds. In iconography, the golden rays on the garment’s folds correspond to the description as found in the Gospels: “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (Mark 9:3) and “As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning” (Luke 9:29), about which St Gregory says the following: “Ἐλαμπρύνθη μὲν οὖν τῷ αὐτῷ φωτὶ καὶ τὸ προσκυνητὸν ἐκεῖνο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σῶμα καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐπίσης· τὸ μὲν γὰρ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος ἔλαμψε, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια ὡς ἐγγίζοντα τῷ σώματι ἐκείνου φωτεινὰ ἐγένετο” (Homily 35, 6). Based on these words, we can assume that the iconographer of this period wished to create a difference in the brightness of Christ’s face and garments, indirectly showing the distinction of Christ’s two natures: the brightness of Christ as the sun means His divine nature; while the brightness of His garments means His divine body. According to St Anastasius of Antioch, the brightness of Christ’s garments exists to depict the change of our bodies, as we became His garment, when He dressed our body: “Καὶ ἔλαμψε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, φησὶν, ὡς ἥλιος· καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένοντο λευκὰ ὡσεὶ χιών’. Οὐχ ὅτι δὲ πρὸς ἥλιον ἢ χιόνα παράθεσιν ἔχει, ταῦτα γέγραπται (τίς γὰρ τοῦ ἀσυγκρίτου σύγκρισις), ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ τῶν ἐνύλων οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ἢ λαμπρότερον τοῦ ἡλίου, ἢ λευκότερον τῆς χιόνος, μετρίως θέλων παραστήσαι τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ φωτός, καὶ τῆς λαμπρότητος, διὰ τῶν γνωρίμων ἡμῖν ἐποίησατο τὴν εἰκασίαν. Δηλοῖ δὲ τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐλλαμψις τῶν ἡμετέρων σωμάτων τὴν ὑπαλλαγὴν. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ αὐτῷ γεγονάμεν ἐνδύμα, ὅτι τὴν ἡμῶν περιεβάλετο σάρκα. Καὶ ἴσως τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐλάμψαν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, αὐτὸ τὸ ἴδιον αὐτοῦ σῶμα συμβολικῶς αἰνίττεται· τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ τὰ ὡς χιών λευκά, τοὺς δι’ αὐτοῦ καθαιρομένους, διὰ τῆς μεταποιητικῆς καὶ ἀλλοιωτικῆς αὐτοῦ δυνάμεως”, Λόγος 1^{ος} εἰς τὴν Μεταμόρφωσιν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ

Χριστοῦ, PG 89, 1368 C. St Gregory makes this further elaboration in his *Homily*: “καὶ διὰ τοιούτων ἔδειξε, τίνες αἱ στολαὶ τῆς δόξης, ἃς ἐνδύσονται κατὰ τὸν μέλλοντα αἰῶνα οἱ ἐγγίζοντες Θεῷ, καὶ τίνα τὰ ἐνδύματα τῆς ἀναμαρτησίας, ἃ διὰ τὴν παράβασιν ὁ Ἀδὰμ ἀπεκδυσάμενος” (*Homily* 35, 6). These passages may have been used by the iconographers as a theological background when they tried to depict the garments as matching the theology expressed by St Gregory. Their use of gold, white and bright colours, indicates their desire to make a distinction between the dignity and the honour of the faces of both Christ and the Holy Virgin, as well as the faces of the saints.

The light, which appeared on Mount Tabor, can explain also the light of the Kingdom of the Heavens, which is depicted on the icons by the golden background. Here, we wish to cite the interpretation of St Gregory: “οὐ γὰρ φωτὸς τὰ λαμπόμενα λευκά τε καὶ στίλβοντα ποιεῖν, ἀλλ’ ὁποῖαν τὴν χρειαὴν δεικνῦναι, τὸ δ’ ὥς ἔοικεν, ἀπεκάλυψε, μᾶλλον δὲ ἡλλοίωσε αὐτά, ὃ φωτὸς οὐκ ἔστιν αἰσθητοῦ” (*Homily* 35, 7). In the eyes of the Archbishop of Thessalonica, the golden background of the icon brings about the effect of the Uncreated Light, the light of the Kingdom of the Heavens; this is significant for hesychastic asceticism, theology and spirituality.

The presence of the Uncreated Light in the Byzantine icons of this time is related to the depiction of the “halo” (*δόξα*). Professor Fr A. Andreopoulos (Andreopoulos 2005, pp.83-100) has discussed in detail the theology of Metamorphosis and its depiction in Byzantine art. In the wall paintings and the icons by Theophanes, we see a distinct depiction of this particularity of Christ’s Divinity. In the iconographic cycle of Theophanes, we encounter Christ with “δόξα” in four icons: *Transfiguration*, *Resurrection*, *Ascension* and the *Dormition of the Holy Virgin*. The nimbus (halos) in each one are different. The brightest one is found in the icon of the *Resurrection*.

The nimbus here is barely recognizable and it is inserted into the golden background of Christ’s Resurrection. The importance of Christ’s Resurrection is highlighted with plenty of light, with life’s siege of death, and light’s siege of darkness.

In the icon of the *Transfiguration*, Christ’s nimbus consists of three parts: just behind Christ, we see a square with concave corners. Behind this square, a square-rhombus, and behind this a larger circle, which has two zones, an inner darker zone and a lighter zone at its ends. Out from the cycle are diffuse rays of uncreated light, from which the three lower rays are the largest and throw light onto the three apostles. We suppose that, since Christ spoke on Mount Tabor with the prophets Moses



Resurrection, Theophanes the Cretan, Stavronikita monastery, 16th c.

and Elias of His decease, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31), i.e. for His Passion, Theophanes, with the help of the two cruciform squares, emphasizes this instant, so that Tabor appears as a prior notification of the Golgotha. The third element of Christ's nimbus is the circle, which has two zones: the inner zone and the outer zone. The cruciform squares and the double circle emphasizes the Trinity of Christ's glory so that the two zones symbolize the glory of both the father and the

Holy Spirit. The inner darker zone of the circle symbolizes the Father, because the Father is Him that is less revealed; the Father generates the Son and is the One from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds; the outer, lighter zone that encounters creation, symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, the rays originate and shine from the darker zone symbolizing the triune essence of God, by which all the powers and the energies of the Holy Trinity proceed.

When we examine the details of the iconographic composition and the details of the Transfiguration icon, we can see a difference in relation to the previous period. We can see a distinct highlighted dynamic and the dramatic element of the whole composition. This is achieved with three details: the enlargement of Christ's figure in relation to the figures of the prophets Moses and Elijah; the evolution of the complexity and dramatic elements of His nimbus; and also the depiction of the three apostles in a prone stance—they are depicted bowed, as if they are plummeting from Tabor's slopes. It is obvious that the painter wished to use these details to stress something, which in previous ages was less important. Saint Gregory's *Homilies* and other theological works help us decode this meaning. According to St Gregory, the encounter of God and man on Tabor's summit occurred so that the Lord could lift us up from our humble nature: the ascension of the apostles, Peter, James and John, on the tall mountain is the ascension of our natural humility.

Christ's nimbus in the Byzantine icon of the Ascension is also triune: it is depicted as a circle consisting of three zones: the dark zone in the centre, a middle one, and a bright one at the ends. The same principle has been applied: the face of the Father is the cause of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is also the order of the appearance of the *hypostaseis* into creation: the Father appeared in the Old Testament; the Son appeared in the New Testament; and the Holy Spirit appeared after the Ascension. To confirm such an interpretation of Christ's nimbus, we can cite the following: Christ is depicted sitting on a red band, that which passes over the darker zone, and confirms the words of the apostle: *the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father* (John 1:18). The middle zone has Christ's seated figure with an outstretched right hand, by which He blesses. In the end, the rays springing from Christ's body emerge from the centre of the circle, along with the circle of the Father, in a similar fashion to Christ's nimbus in the Transfiguration icon. This highlights the triune divine essence, which is unknown and unreachable; this is why it is darker. From Christ's nimbus spring rays symbolizing the revealing of the mystery of Holy Trinity. The divine triune *hypostaseis* here is depicted and defined by shapes and colours.



Ascension, Theophanes the Cretan, Stavronikita monastery, 16th c.

We can also see that in relation to the arrangement of the concentric circles and the actinic energies that exist in the *Transfiguration*, Christ's nimbus in the Byzantine icon of the *Dormition* is of a different type. The icon bears the shape of an almond and is flanked by four angels on either side and by cherubim on the top. The halo, as with the angel

figures, have been depicted more darkly than the other figures, because, according to the preferred interpretation, Theophanes wished to stress the atmosphere of mourning of the Virgin's passing through the gate of death. Judging by the outlines, we can also refer here to the triune character of Christ's nimbus.



Dormition of the Holy Virgin, Theophanes the Cretan, Stavronikita monastery, 1546.

Vranos notes, in relation to Byzantine iconography of Christ of the Cretan period (*Transfiguration, Resurrection, Ascension*), the following:

“In the Byzantine icons of the Cretan School (16th century) all the surface of the ‘nimbus’ is made by a dark tint of the color green. The golden rays of the Energies shine more onto the dark background. The strong turnover and coexistence of the shining gold and the dark background refer to the theological truth about God, i.e., God is the ‘over-shining darkness’. With simultaneous use of the opposite terms (light, darkness), the iconographer states that the divine is neither light nor darkness, but something over these, something that surpasses these” (Vranos 2005, p.73).

The above examples of the depiction of Christ's nimbus show that Theophanes the Cretan knew the theological position of Saint Gregory on both the uncreated light and the Transfiguration, according to which God's energies and powers, and among them the uncreated light and glory, are substantiated and triune, i.e., they belong to all the persons of the Holy Trinity. As proof of the above, we can cite the words of Saint Gregory, which tell us that the glory of Christ is exactly the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: “δόξαν θεοῦ, δόξαν Χριστοῦ, δόξαν πνεύματος” (Hagiorite Tome, 4; Chrestou (ed.), *Συγγράμματα* Vol. 2, p.573).

Conclusion

As a final thought on the relation of Saint Gregory's teaching about the Taborian Light and its depiction in hesychastic iconography, we may cite the words of Leonid Uspensky, which refer to this spiritual phenomenon:

“With the teaching of the Taborian Light the Church acknowledged that this divine energy that transfigures the man has as its source the uncreated and incorruptible, the energy of God, which one feels and sees bodily. Thus, the teaching for the divine energies coincides with the teaching for the holy icons, because in the discussion of the Taborian Light what was formulated dogmatically is man's *theosis* and consequently the basis on the icon's content. It is at this time that the boundaries of ecclesiastical art are defined, beyond which this art cannot remain art of the Church” (Ouspensky 1982, p.291).

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APPENDIX

Holy Metropolis of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia
Holy Monastery of Theotokos of Kallipetra
Skete of Veroia

25 May 2009

To: His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Veroia, Naousa and Campagnia Mr Panteleimon

Re: The Holy family of Palamades

Your Eminence,

For many years our humble brotherhood has lived in the Holy Skete of Veroia, a place of hesychasm with the more than fifty monasteries and a long monastic history and a plethora of holy *asketes*, with the great and most important theologian St Gregory Palamas being one among them.

Having researched for many years the records of the holy monasteries of the Skete, we have enquired about the sanctity of the members of St Gregory Palamas' family, of which the two brothers, Theodosios and Makarios, became monks in the Skete of Veroia, while St Gregory Palamas was here (and Theodosios slept in the Lord in the Skete itself). Their sisters, Epicharis and Theodote, came here as nuns and stayed for many years in Veroia, longing for what St Gregory Palamas himself notes: "having their minds steadfast upon the heavens, being disciples of the one who went to heaven for us, visibly and invisibly to unite with God there and to know things that cannot be said and cannot be seen, [...] showing some of God's divine brightness" (*Triads*, 1, 2).

Two researchers into the life of St Gregory Palamas and his family, St Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Elder of Holy Mt Athos Theokletos Dionysiates note: "According to the precise expression of David's psalm, the family of St Gregory Palamas was a generation of 'upright faithful'. The father, mother, two brothers, two sisters, and chief among them St Gregory Palamas himself, were as a whole, a family of saints. They followed the example of the family of St Basil the Great and St Gregory the Theologian" (Monk Theokletos

Dionysiates, p.1).

With no hyperbole, Elder Theokletos continues: “What was the factor that gathered and harmonised in sanctity the seven souls? The father performed miracles, the mother became a holy nun. From the offspring, the two maidens slept in the Lord with the gift of prophesy; the two brothers excelled in *askesis*” (ibid, p.2).

Firstly, we read in Philotheos Kokkinos that the father of Gregory, Constantinos Palamas, was constantly in a state of *nepsis* and deep prayer, even during the meetings of the Senate at the Emperor’s Court (ibid, p.3). And Elder Theokletos notes: “To put it briefly, he was adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit”. Constantinos’ home in Constantinople was frequently visited by visiting monks and spiritual teachers, having the name of “*Frontistirion*” (ibid, p.5).¹ The sanctity of Constantinos Palamas is noted by Elder Theokletos, in reference to the miracle while on a family visit to their spiritual father, not very far from Constantinople. The family did not prepare a meal to have with them, and while on a boat, Constantinos, after being in deep prayer, put his hands in the sea and captured with his own hands a large fish, saying to his family: “this is the food that Christ has procured for us” (ibid, p.6).

Foreseeing his death, Constantinos became a monk with the name Constantios and he wished to leave the welfare of his family to the Mother of God (even though the Emperor was his personal friend and he could ask him a favour). According to Theokletos, Constantios did this confirming that “the one who has true belief lives in the world of things not seen” (ibid, p.7).

The brothers of Gregory, Theodosios and Makarios, decided together to follow their brother into the life of seclusion, having the same mind and desire to live the life of monks. While they were in the Skete of Veroia, according to Philotheos, “they lived a life that was equal in sanctity to the other lives of the monks there and were in constant holy communion with God” (ibid, p.28).

Their mother, Kalloni, became a nun with the name “Kalli” and slept in the Lord, in many virtues and deep prayer. When Gregorios visited his sisters, who became nuns together with their mother, he praised them: “As soon as he saw the stature of his nun sisters, their spiritual greatness and virtue, he praised their spiritual struggles and the purity of their life. And he thanked the Lord for the gifts of the Spirit on his sisters” (ibid,

¹ Editor and translator: *frontistirion* (or *φροντιστήριον*) is the name associated with the philosophical school of Socrates in ancient Athens and was widely used in early Christian times to indicate a gathering of Christians interested in deepening their faith.

p.30). He placed his sisters in a monastery in Veroia and he went into our Holy Skete of Veroia, just 15 Km from the city. Theokletos praised the saints at this point in this way: “Five saints, brothers and sisters! You stand higher of all earthly things and of all earthly desires! Great souls, noble spirits, pure hearts! You try to keep yourselves untouched by the characteristics of our fallen nature, the world and the devil, and your souls have been deemed worthy of God’s illumination, via uncreated energies!” (ibid, p.30).

Regarding the sanctity of his older sister (Epicharis), Philotheos writes the following: “she proceeds with glory towards God, crowned with virtuous and ascetic gifts, invisible to the many apostolic signs, showing truly her receipt of abundant grace. And foreseeing via divine inspiration, the death of Theodosios, the second of her brothers, she announces it to Gregorios and Makarios”. Theokletos adds: “Blessed Epicharis was pure as a lily from her childhood. She had all virtues dear to her from her first steps, and as she grew, her soul became more attracted to God. She was humble and continuously in mourning for the Lord. All earthly things she regarded with contempt, being noble in her soul. About this saintly and noble virgin, many times her brother Gregorios, narrated many admirable things, which he had heard from his mother” (ibid, pp.30-31). She was foretold of her death ten days before it took place, and without being in the slightest discomfort regarding her health. All her prophesies regarding her brothers and sister came to fruition. Regarding Theodote (her sister), Philotheos writes that “when she died her room was filled with divine fragrance”.

That all the members of the Palamas family slept in the Lord in sanctity, undeniably proves their participation in the “Land of the Living”. Their lives as a whole, adorned with a multitude of virtues, were nothing else but a sign of their sanctification. So, we are not asking for their “canonization”, but for the recognition of their sanctity. Of course, someone could ask the question, whether this would better take place during the recognition of the sanctity of St Gregory Palamas. But we think that this is not a valid question for three reasons:

1. Because during the long period in which St Gregory Palamas was persecuted by the heretics, the faithful thought that it was more important to establish the sanctity of St Gregory Palamas and, so, any attempt to establish the sanctity of his family through an accumulation of evidence was deemed unnecessary at the time. The same goes for the lack of writings about the life of the family of the great Saint and the lack of Church hymns. Another important factor here is the total destruction of the Holy Skete of Veroia in 1822 by the Ottoman Turks, which made it

impossible to preserve the writings and evidence that testified to the local honour of the Palamas family. The same goes for many other local saints of the Skete of Veroia, whose memory was not preserved in writings in other parts of Greece or the Orthodox World.

2. Because during the time of the recognition of the sanctity of St Gregory Palamas the enemies of the Saint were still alive, and they would place serious obstacles in any attempt to recognise the sanctity of the family of the great Saint. Note that the enemies of St Gregory were involved in serious diplomatic and political struggles at various levels of the administration of the Byzantine Empire and they still had considerable political power many years after Palamas' death. Any move to further promote Palamite theology or anything associated with the great Saint would be considered a further cause of friction in an area and time that was particularly troublesome.

3. Because up to this point in history there was no necessity for official recognition of the saints. All the family of Palamas could be very well venerated as saints in the Skete of Veroia, without special services and special hymnology dedicated to the saints, because the hesychastic climate in the Holy Skete of Veroia necessitated a life in deep and ceaseless prayer. The intercession of the saints was considered a right and blessing upon all members of the Skete that called upon their names.

Thus, with this short report we note our position on the sanctity of the Palamades family, a position which is expressed daily with our prayers for their intercession, both privately in our cells and publicly in our Church. This is also the position of many theologians and other faithful, who, from time to time, visit our Church and express their wish to venerate the saints with us.

Wishing for the blessing of Your Ecclesiastical authority on their official veneration, we ask, as your spiritual children, to proceed to all necessary actions that will recognise the family of the great Saint as saints, something that will add one more example of a family of saints to today's troubled world.

With the intercession of the holy Family of Palamas your humble spiritual children,
The Abbot and Monks of Holy Theotokos of Kallipetra

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The Right Reverend Archimandrite Abbot Palamas (Kyrillides) of the Holy Monastery of Theotokos Kallipetras in Skete Veroias. He lived as a monk for many years in the Monastery of St John the Forerunner and Baptist, at Skete Veroias, before being entrusted with his current position as Abbot at the nearby Monastery of Theotokos Kallipetras (which has recently been re-established). He has written books in Greek about the history of Skete Veroias (the community of monks outside Veroia where St Gregory Palamas lived for some years as a monk) and he was actively involved in the effort of the Holy Metropolis of Veroia to gain recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Palamas family as saints (most of his family lived as monks and nuns in Veroia).

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